

Presidential elections in US

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Manifest pedagogy: The presidential elections in the USA are looked at not only from the perspectives of America, but also the kind of impact it may have on outcomes of trade, security, peace and relations with the rest of the world.

In news: The 2020 United States presidential election is scheduled for November 3, 2020.

Placing it in syllabus: President

Dimensions:

- Details of entire system
- Comparison with Indian system

Content:

An election for president of the US happens every four years on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

Details of entire system:

- The US president and vice president are not elected directly by citizens.
- Instead, **they're chosen by "electors"** through a **process called the Electoral College.**
- The process of using electors comes from the US Constitution.

U.S. Constitutional Requirements for Presidential Candidates:

The president must:

- Be a natural-born citizen of the United States
- Be at least 35 years old

- Have been a resident of the United States for 14 years

Once a candidate raises or spends more than \$5,000 for their campaign, they must **register with the Federal Election Commission**. It includes **naming a principal campaign committee** to raise and spend campaign funds.



Primaries, Caucuses, and Political Conventions:

- The states use the **two methods of primary elections and caucuses** to select a potential presidential nominee tooltip.
- Primaries use secret ballots for voting.
- Caucuses are local gatherings of voters who vote at the end of the meeting for a particular candidate.
- Then political parties each select a nominee to unite behind.
- During a political party convention, each presidential nominee also announces a vice presidential running mate.
- The candidates then campaign across the country to explain their views and plans to voters.

Role of the Electoral College:

- To win the election, a candidate must receive a majority of electoral votes.
- **If no candidate receives a majority**, the House of Representatives chooses the president and the Senate chooses the vice president.

How Does the Electoral College Process Work?

- After ballot is cast for the president, each vote goes to a statewide tally.
- In **48 states and Washington D.C.**, the winner gets all the electoral votes for that state.

- **Maine and Nebraska states assign their electors using a proportional system.**
- A candidate needs the vote of **at least 270 electors, more than half of all electors** to win the presidential election.
- In most cases, a projected winner is announced on election night in November after voting.
- But the **actual Electoral College vote takes place in mid-December** when the electors meet in their states.

The Electors:

- Each state gets **as many electors as it has members of Congress (House and Senate).**
- Including Washington, D.C.'s three electors, there are currently 538 electors in all.
- Each state's political parties choose their own slate of potential electors.
- **It is possible to win the Electoral College but lose the popular vote** (This happened in 2000, in 2016 and three times in the 1800s).

Case where no Candidate wins a Majority of Electoral Votes:

- If no candidate receives a majority of electoral votes, **the vote goes to the House of Representatives.**
- House members choose the new president from among the top three candidates (This has only happened once in 1824).
- The **Senate elects the vice president from the remaining top two candidates.**

Comparison with Indian system:

Casting of votes-

- India in its electoral college system, has 4,896 voters

- compared with the U.S.'s 538 electoral college members.
- In India, people vote for national and state lawmakers, who in turn elect the president. Whereas in U.S., **electors are appointed party officials** and obliged to give their votes to the candidate with the majority win in their states.
 - After casting their votes, Indian electors must also list at least one second choice for president in case a candidate does not meet the vote quota, in which case their vote is transferred to their next choice.

Secrecy of votes:

- Unlike voting for a bill or parliamentary motion, Indian electors are supposed to keep their votes secret.
- In the U.S. how people vote is private, but many other voter data are public record.

Counting of votes:

- Unlike India, where counting is often held days or even weeks after voting, **in the US, counting begins as soon as voting is over in a particular state**. The results are also publicly announced.
- The value of a member of the Legislative Assembly's votes depends on the population of his or her state. In the U.S. where the number of electors per state depends on its population, the value of a member of Parliament's vote remains the same regardless of population.
- In the US, one can win the popular vote and still lose the election. Winner-Take-All is the criteria in all states except two, Maine and Nebraska. So the candidate that gets the largest number of votes (not a majority) is declared to have won the state and gets all the electoral votes of that state.

Other differences:

- The date of the election in the US is fixed, i.e. the

first Tuesday after the first Monday of November, since 1845.

- There is no centralised election management body in the US like the Election Commission in India.
- The **US has two federal bodies – the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and the US Election Assistance Commission (EAC)** – but both of them together do not add up to anything as powerful or effective as the EC in India. They have no control over the election administration. Their role is confined to federal campaign finance regulations.