

SHOULD WE ABOLISH THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE?

THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA FOR HOMEWORK, IN-CLASS TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.

INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Students can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE: WHY SUCH A BIG DEBATE?

Above the Noise | Oct 10, 2019 | Video

9:19 minutes

Five times throughout U.S. history, the candidate who became president lost the popular vote, but won the electoral vote. Two of those times were in the last 20 years, reinvigorating debates as to whether we should continue to use the electoral college system.

- In 2016, Hilary Clinton won the popular vote, but Donald Trump won the electoral vote and therefore became president.
- There are 530 electors: each state and the District of Columbia get at least three electors, and the remainder are designated to states based on their population, as determined by the census every three years.
- In most states, there is a “winner takes all” system, where whoever wins the popular vote in that state gets all of the electoral votes. However, in Nevada and Maine, they designate electors to each party based on who wins each congressional district.

CAN THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE SYSTEM BE CHANGED?

PBS Newshour | April 7, 2019 | Video

4:46 minutes

As the Electoral College system was written into the constitution, abolishing the electoral college would either require a change to the constitution, or a pact on the state level where enough states agree to vote for whoever wins the national popular vote. This video discusses how feasible each of these options truly are.

- Abolishing the Electoral College system through a change to the constitution would require two-thirds of the House of Representatives, two-thirds of the Senate, and then three-quarters of states to agree to such a change
- Abolishing the Electoral College system on a state by state level would require a group of states with a total of 270 electors to sign a pact agreeing to vote for whoever wins the national popular vote, no matter if that person won the actual election in each of those state.
- Proponents of the Electoral College argue that it forces candidates to campaign in battleground states in middle America with smaller populations.
- Those in favor of the national vote system understand that candidates would turn their attention away from these states and toward larger cities, but these cities are where the majority of the country’s population live.

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help students to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.

SUPREME COURT RULES STATE 'FAITHLESS ELECTOR' LAWS CONSTITUTIONAL

NPR | July 6, 2020 | Audio

On July 6, 2020, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld laws that remove or punish Electoral College delegates who refuse to cast their votes for the presidential candidate they were pledged to support. These delegates are referred to as “faithless electors.”

- Although most states have laws that say electors have to vote for the popular vote winner, only 15 states actually enforce this through laws that remove or penalize electors who don't vote for the popular vote winner.
- This 2020 Supreme Court decision allows states to remove faithless electors even without a state law.
- Without “faithless elector” laws, presidential candidates would be able to try to threaten or bribe electors to vote in a particular way.

KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your classroom and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Electors
- Faithless Elector
- Popular Vote
- Census

CONTEMPLATE

Students will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?
6. When was this media created, and is it still relevant?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help students answer these five questions about each piece of media.

DEBATE

Students will engage their peers in an evidence-based debate using the media they just analyzed. Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form an evidence-based response to the debate question.

In addition to rich in-class discussions, teachers can also connect with other classrooms through the Thinkalong website.

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