

FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,
ANDREW JACKSON,
of the State of Tennessee.

FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,
WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON,
OF THE STATE OF OHIO.

For President of the United States,
ZACHARY TAYLOR,
Of the State of Louisiana.

For President of the United States,
ABRAHAM LINCOLN,
of Illinois

These "cards" are actually the ballots cast by members of the Electoral College.

Voting for Strangers

BY GARY BUGH

Politics and New York's Electoral College have always gone hand in hand, from the earliest days of state government to the supremacy of the two-party system. Blame it on the Constitution...

If you look closely at the fine print on the ballot at your polling place on November 2, you might see this short phrase atop the list of names of presidential candidates: "Electors for..." This means that although you'll be voting for the candidate of your choice, you're doing so via a slate of designated citizens who, well after the popular vote has been counted and the winner declared, will gather on December 13 in states across the country to actually elect the next president and vice president of the United States.

The large group to which these electors belong was established by the U.S. Constitution, and is called the Electoral College. While its electors confirm the decision made by the people in each state, they must also honor their pledge to cast their votes for the candidate chosen by the political party that also chose them. So when we vote for president, we are actually voting for strangers who have been selected by that party to elect a candidate for us.

NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES



Patricia Jaworowicz and Morton Haves cast their ballots at the 1976 Electoral College meeting.



Eyes on the Prize

It's complicated, legal, local—and eminently political. Each state and the District of Columbia has its own Electoral College; the number of a state's electors is equal to the number of that state's congressional representatives (which reflects population) plus senators (two per state). New York currently holds thirty-one of the nation's 538 electoral votes. Its Electoral College is one of the oldest and largest in the country, and its history exemplifies, through the commonly used "winner-take-all" method, the

Electoral College meeting. This works to consolidate the major parties' power, since minor parties rarely receive electoral votes. But it is also a "loser-gets-nothing" method: a candidate who fails to win in a particular state receives no electoral votes at all in that state, no matter how many popular votes he or she has actually gotten. For example, independent candidate Ross Perot (whose Reform Party was not created until after the election) won 19% of the national popular vote in 1992, but received not a single electoral vote.

Knowing there's an ultimate "prize" to this system greatly boosts the influence and power of the two major parties, and helps them gain support for both candidate and party during campaign season. With their superior state and local organizations and financial resources, Republicans and Democrats have an easier time winning a state's popular vote than do smaller parties and independent candidates.



The only photographs among the Electoral College records at the State Archives are from 1976's Electoral College meeting. Electors Fred Stalbert and Aileen Ryan are shown here.

advantage that the presidential election system extends to the two major political parties, Republican and Democrat.

The winner-take-all system, used by every state (except Maine and Nebraska) and by the District of Columbia to transform its popular vote into electoral votes, allows the candidate (and by default, the party) who wins the most popular votes in a state in November to receive all of that state's electoral votes at the December

The Constitution protects the right of each state to determine how to appoint electors—a rule ultimately advantageous to major parties. New York's history illustrates this well. The state legislature chose electors for the first few elections, a practice that allowed partisan differences to divide the state's electoral votes among different candidates. Then in 1788, the Assembly and Senate could not agree on a slate of electors, which prevented the state from participating in the first presidential election. In 1828, New York's districts chose electors, but this also led to a split vote. Since the adoption of the winner-take-all method in 1832, a single party has won all of New York's electoral votes each election.

The actual Electoral College meeting in each state (which follows the presidential election) also benefits the major parties, providing an opportunity for consolidation and exercise of party power at best—and unabashed grand-

For Presidents of the United States

*For President of the United States
Warren G. Harding
of the
State of Ohio
New York Electoral College*

FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
THOMAS W. HAYES

standing at worst. In 1893 and 1897, electors introduced resolutions supporting candidates for the U.S. Senate. In 1889, patriotic Republicans mustered a 100-gun salute after the balloting. (Congress moved the date of the electors' meeting to January of the following year in 1887; in 1934, it was moved back to December). The meeting also sets the stage for future party wins by showing the strength and support of the parties.

In New York, along with a few other states, state party committees appoint electors, generally party leaders and loyalists. Horace Greeley, founding editor of the *New York Tribune* and early leader of the Republican Party, was a New York elector in 1864. So was abolitionist Fredrick Douglass, a Republican who voted at the 1872 meeting and delivered New York's votes to the president of the U.S. Senate. Elector Horatio Seymour, former Democratic governor of New York and early presidential candidate, said of the contentious defeat in 1876 of popular vote winner Samuel Tilden by Republican Rutherford Hayes, "The Democratic Party, conscious of its strength and the justness of its position, and feeling that future power is theirs, will do no unwise nor unpatriotic act which will destroy its heritage." John Jacob Astor balloted at the 1880 Republican meeting, as did piano manufacturer William Steinway in 1893 and George Eastman of Rochester in 1901.

Other high-profile party leaders who served as New York electors have included Governors Averell Harriman, Herbert Lehman, Hugh Carey, and Mario Cuomo, as well as former National Democratic Chair James Farley and New York City Mayors Abraham Beame and David Dinkins. Albany's longtime mayor Erastus Corning II once filled in for an absent Democratic elector. Elizabeth Moynihan, wife of U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and his 1988 re-election campaign chair, served in 1988 and 1992.



NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

A Charitable Tradition

Even the meager pay electors still receive for attending the meeting has been subject to politicking. Democratic electors of 1913 began the tradition of donating their Electoral College earnings to charity when they gave their \$15 stipends and mileage reimbursements to three Albany hospitals. Electors at each of the four Franklin Roosevelt election meetings from 1932 to 1944 sent their money to the Warm Springs Foundation for Infantile Paralysis in Georgia, while 1992's and 1996's electors made contributions to the Children's Aid Society and Gay Men's Health Crisis, respectively. In 2000, they gave to Senior Services of Albany through the United Way.

In 1917, Republican electors declined to follow this practice and decided not to donate their stipends to charity. According to the Albany *Times Union*, one anonymous elector said, "We'll have nobody vote our money to anything or anybody. We're just against the principle

State party committees often appoint high-profile party leaders as electors. Samuel O. Fredman and Rev. Donald Harrington line up behind New York City Mayor Abraham Beame to cast their ballots.

FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

THOMAS E. DEWEY

OF THE
STATE OF NEW YORK
NEW YORK ELECTORAL COLLEGE
1948

FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

JOHN F. KENNEDY

OF THE
STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS
NEW YORK ELECTORAL COLLEGE
1960

FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

OF THE
STATE OF MINNESOTA
NEW YORK ELECTORAL COLLEGE
1968

FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

JIMMY CARTER

OF THE
STATE OF GEORGIA
NEW YORK ELECTORAL COLLEGE
1976

NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES



New York, as well as forty-seven other states and the District of Columbia, uses the winner-take-all system of assigning electoral votes: the winner of the popular vote receives all of the state's electoral votes. New York County Clerk Norman Goodman holds the ballot box while Governor Hugh Carey votes.

of the thing." The newspaper reported that electors "pocketed their checks and went home." But in 1972 and 1980, Republicans donated their stipends to Eisenhower College, and in 1984 they gave their pay to Catholic Relief Services for famine relief in Ethiopia.

Questioning Their Existence

At the meeting, New York's electors have also traditionally announced their positions on Electoral College reform. In 1936, elector Daniel S. Quigley was ready to submit a resolution for the state's electors to condemn the Electoral College and call for election by popular vote, but was dissuaded from doing so after a request by Secretary of State Edward Flynn. As host of the state's 1944 meeting, New York Republican Secretary of State Thomas J. Curran supported elimination of the Electoral College. In his speech before the Democratic electors, Curran asserted that this would likely be the last such gathering, since so many Americans regarded

the procedure as outmoded. Elector Alice Campbell Good, however, attending her fourth meeting, disagreed with Curran's viewpoint, explaining that she had "always felt that the Electoral College was one of the finest examples of...checks and balances in state government."

In 1968 and 1972, Republican Secretary of State John P. Lomenzo argued for keeping the Electoral College but removing the independence of electors and the House contingency procedure outlined in the Twelfth Amendment (which, in case of no electoral majority for a presidential candidate, allows each state delegation in the House of Representatives one vote to choose from the top three candidates). Several Democratic electors at New York's 2000 meeting also favored amending the system. Elector and Attorney General Eliot Spitzer proposed several reforms to state election law, including same-day registration, a database of registered voters, and modernized voting machines.

Our will—and our votes—remain to be counted in 2004. While those votes may go to unnamed electors, every person's vote still matters in a system where the candidate with the most popular votes in each state moves ahead in the electoral vote tally. But the biggest winners in this process are the major parties, aided by the Electoral College—an unintended consequence of the freedom given to the states in the process of electing a president. ■

Sources for this article included documents, news articles, electoral meeting proceedings, interviews, books, journals, election tabulations both historical and contemporary, and state and federal election guides and procedural manuals. Particular collections of the New York Department of State, Electoral College, and the State Board of Elections in the State Archives and State Library were especially helpful.



THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
RONALD REAGAN
 48 1960
 1745 G ST. S.W.
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20540



THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
BILL CLINTON
 47 1992
 1600 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20540

Facts About the Electoral College

Article II of the Constitution established the Electoral College (although the term itself is not found in the Constitution), and guarantees every state, as well as the District of Columbia (added by the Twenty-Third Amendment in 1961), at least three electoral votes.

The "colleges of electors (the designation means decision-making body)" perform three activities during a presidential election year: 1) Electors are appointed by political parties; 2) Electors are themselves "elected" by voters in every state in November; 3) Electors cast their ballots in December and deliver their totals to Washington D.C. Congress then officially counts the nation's electoral votes in January.

Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia use the "winner-take-all" method of assigning electoral votes. Maine and Nebraska use district systems, whereby the statewide popular vote determines two at-large electors, and voting in the districts determines the rest.

A presidential ticket needs a majority of electoral votes to win the White House, currently 270 out of 538 electors.

This canvass of votes cast by New Yorkers in the 1960 presidential election shows just how close the Kennedy-Nixon race was.

NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES

Form 20-A, 1-14-60 (Rev. 3-22-58)

State of New York, ss.

Witnessed of the whole number of votes cast for all the candidates for the office of **PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES**

at a general election held in the said State, on the **EIGHTH** day of November, in the year **1960**, wherein the several counties in which the said votes were given are distinguished.

COUNTY	REPUBLICAN NIXON LODGE	DEMOCRATIC KENNEDY JENNINGS	LIBERAL JOHNSON	SOV. WING DUBOIS WELLS	BLANK	VOID	SCATTER VOTES	WEEK NUMBER OF VOTES
Albany	81,600	88,026	3,777	117	1067	2		159741
Albany	19,908	4875	365	7	195			19810
Bacon	56,967	36,778	1,944	56	799	6		97790
Cattaraugus	21,799	13,740	1,057	29	190			36773
Cayuga	20,937	16,547	688	23	577	5		38317
Chemung	37,836	24,796	1,177	51	515	12		66556
Chemung	26,667	17,152	797	28	312			99708
Chemung	1,9333	5,187	470	12	198			20902
Chenango	11,157	12,676	1,104	15	327	8		25286
Columbia	1,5873	8,007	773	27	276			27940
Columbia	18,705	8,437	286	9	194			18367
Columbia	16,336	5,932	230	13	183	2		22196
Columbia	7,6109	18,155	1,987	50	891	1	3	76896
Columbia	2,11757	26,284	1,937	407	407			773578
Columbia	1,1577	5,722	412	10	177	11		18091
Columbia	7,384	9,137	767	17	217	5		49580
Columbia	1,4435	7,777	615	17	175	7		25067
Columbia	1,4727	7,492	761	18	162			25247
Columbia	1,1878	6,182	257	1	299			18617
Columbia	2,168	797	98	1	47			7103
Columbia	1,7758	15,835	1,142	33	472	6		33276
Columbia	2,4270	1,4621	1,177	29	386	19	1	40517
Columbia	6,632	3870	186	7	122	6		10825
Columbia	1,3631	7,273	522	7	187	28	1	21671
Columbia	1,6215	7,757	477	16	290	3		24727
Columbia	1,98723	1,37063	4,315	147	2532			27298
Columbia	1,7837	1,5130	796	19	377			31176
Columbia	3,4435	2,43283	2,000	725	7191	36		52240
Columbia	5,001	4,8710	2,770	87	1072			10257
Columbia	3,7313	5,7793	3,575	100	1,432			12918
Columbia	18,7110	8,7130	3,316	150	1,777	58		204208
Columbia	1,7657	1,1981	770	26	188			32119
Columbia	4,8476	2,9195	2,218	62	477	3		80877
Columbia	1,0397	5,265	280	5	188			16052
Columbia	2,4015	1,9823	711	11	468			40086
Columbia	1,7422	7,532	367	26	288			25435
Columbia	1,1798	7,120	873	27	106	1		20073
Columbia	9,0127	3,3483	2427	61	615			76377
Columbia	3,3107	2,5578	1,580	102	535	8		60923
Columbia	1,5818	1,8178	1,112	29	418			95720
Columbia	2,5035	1,6379	1,805	37	902	2		93652
Columbia	40,180	7,4461	2,572	60	477	5		77906
Columbia	7,644	8,097	205	16	142			12144
Columbia	5,201	2,156	187	11	92			7619
Columbia	8,781	3,271	922	1	144	3		19687
Columbia	2,7638	1,3448	430	13	381	15		93875
Columbia	1,66697	1,02222	6811	247	2476	21	21	283682
Columbia	1,8777	1,0185	1301	17	318			25377
Columbia	1,2572	4,671	189	9	133	1		17545
Columbia	1,7041	7,577	1,062	13	125	1		28725
Columbia	3,4418	2,8522	2,495	45	718	2		60220
Columbia	1,4435	4,728	600	17	193			21971
Columbia	1,8037	787	509	6	275			23610
Columbia	2,1270	8,665	811	11	235			31012
Columbia	1,1750	1,77877	1,673	657	3172	36		379835
Columbia	1,0773	5,278	216	4	182			16939
Columbia	6,872	2,227	180	7	76			7704
Total New York State	3,301,314	1,777,675	11,600	3770	87,722	197	174	943,617
Blanco	1,82375	7,29176	4,8472	2,457	1,0973			1758485
Blanco	7,27777	5,97798	9,6897	3,166	1,6082			6779330
New York	2,17271	3,94776	6,8104	3,343	1,7218			3148716
Queens	34,7688	387702	26,976	1,870	14,977			1382876
Rensselaer	80356	3,5622	3,057	93	785			70108
Total New York City	11,97205	1,64621	7,770102	1,0527	51,605		120	3143782
Total New York State	3,301,314	1,777,675	11,600	3770	88,797	197	174	943,617