

Gallup Polls: Consistent Super-Majority Support for a National Popular Vote

The Gallup Poll has asked American citizens for more than six decades about their views about establishing a national popular vote for president. At least three in five Americans consistently have supported going all the way to changing the Constitution to require a national popular vote. When the debate has been most focused for reform – such as in 1968 and in the late 1970s, support for the current system has dropped to below 20%. Democrats and Republicans now see the issue somewhat differently in the wake of the 2000 presidential election, but in 1980, the difference was statistically insignificant: 62% of Republicans, 66% of Democrats and 73% of independents favored a direct national popular vote.

Following is a Gallup Poll summary and highlights are from November 2004 and November 2000 articles by Gallup. For more information, see Gallup Polls at <http://poll.gallup.com/>

Summary

SUMMARY OF THE POLLS: Gallup

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
	%	%	%
2004 Oct 11-14	61	35	4
2000 Dec 15-17	59	37	4
2000 Nov 11-12	61	35	4
1980 Nov 7-10	67	19	14
1977 Jan 14-17	73	15	12
1968 Nov 9-14	81	12	7
1968 Sep 1-6	76	13	11
1967 Oct 6-11	65	22	13
1967 Jan 26-31	58	22	20
1966 Jan 21-26	63	20	17
1944 June 22-27	65	23	13

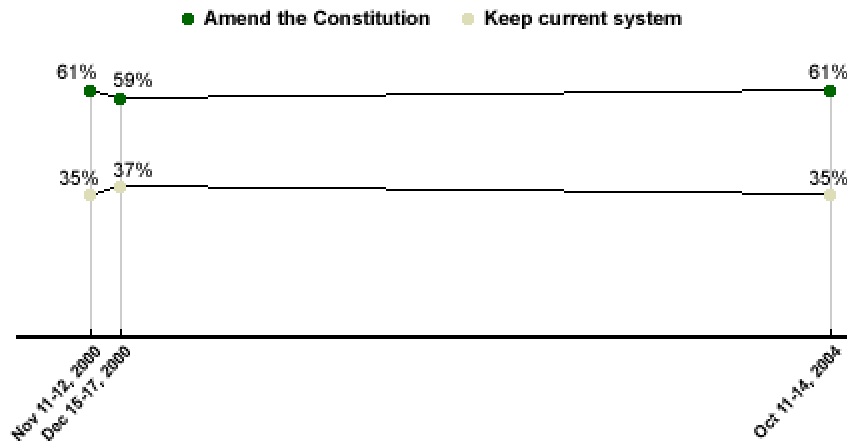
[From November 2, 2004 article by Darren Carlson, Government and Politics Editor at Gallup News Service]

Public Willing to Amend

A Gallup Poll conducted in the wake of the 2000 election showed that a majority of Americans (61%) would support amending the Constitution so that the candidate receiving the most popular votes would win the election. Little more than a third (35%) preferred keeping the Electoral College system as it is. Gallup asked the question again last month* [October 2004] and found that nearly four years later, public opinion on this question is virtually the same.

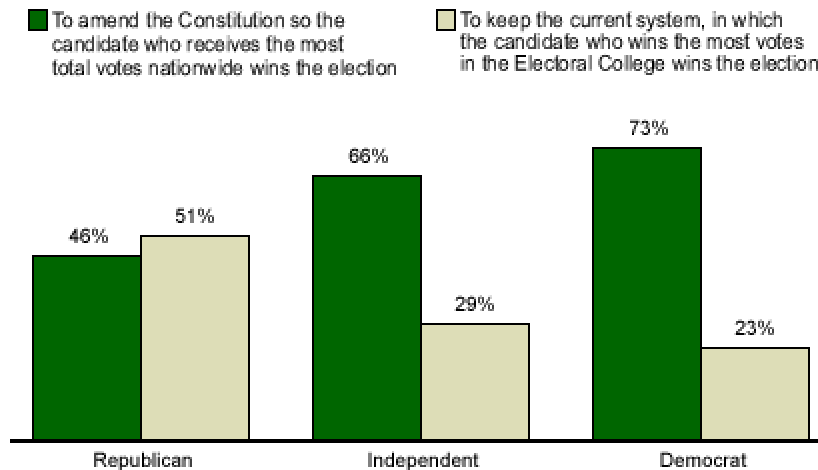
Opinion on Electoral College: 2000 and 2004

Thinking for a moment about the way in which the president is elected in this country, which would you prefer -- to amend the Constitution so the candidate who receives the most total votes nationwide wins the election, or to keep the current system, in which the candidate who wins the most votes in the Electoral College wins the election?



The most recent results for this question about the Electoral College illustrate that support for an amendment is not necessarily bipartisan. Democrats are significantly more likely than Republicans are to support an amendment, probably because their candidate (Gore) won the popular vote but lost the Electoral College vote in 2000. Seventy-three percent of Democrats would prefer an amendment to abolish the Electoral College, compared with less than half (46%) of Republicans.

Thinking for a moment about the way in which the president is elected in this country, which would you prefer?



- *These results are based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,012 adults, aged 18 and older, conducted Oct. 11-14. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is ± 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling*

error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls

The data suggest that all partisans have a fairly long memory -- the current results by party are virtually identical to what they were four years ago...

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2004 Oct 11-14	61	35	4
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1967 Oct 6-11	65	22	13
1967 Jan 26-31	58	22	20
1966 Jan 21-26	63	20	17
1965 June 4-9	57	28	14
1960 March 2-7	50	28	22
1951 August 3-8	57	21	22
1948 August 13-18	63	16	20
1944 June 22-27	65	23	13

***Bold** indicates question was about proportional plan:

“Today the presidential candidate who gets the most popular votes in a state takes all the electoral votes for that state. Do you think this should be changed so that a candidate who gets, say, a third of the popular votes of a state would get a third of the electoral votes of that state rather than none as at present?”

[From November 10, 2000 article from Gallup News Service]

PRINCETON, NJ -- Although the method by which the nation elects its president -- the electoral college versus popular vote -- is now of great importance given the events of the past week, a review of polling history indicates that there have been virtually no questions asking the public their opinion on the issue over the past decade.

Historically, however, the issue was a frequent topic of investigation in the years between World War II and the 1980s. In almost every instance, a majority of Americans during this time period favored -- often by strong margins -- changing the presidential election system to a popular vote system.

Gallup first asked Americans about their opinion on the Electoral College system in 1944, and found almost two thirds favored a shift to a popular vote system. After that point and up through the 1980 election, there were more than 15 Gallup poll questions that found half or more of the public supporting a change in the system, usually by margins of 60% or higher.

One of the more recent questions about the system was asked 12 years ago, in 1988, when a survey sponsored by ABC and the Washington Post found that 77% of Americans said they would rather see the presidency decided by the popular vote.

What follows are representative Gallup poll questions addressing the Electoral College issue asked through the years.

It has been suggested that the electoral vote system be discontinued and Presidents of the U.S. (United States) be elected by total popular vote alone. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
June 22-27, 1944	65%	23	13

Today, the presidential candidate who gets the most popular votes in a state takes all the electoral votes of that state. Do you think this should or should not be changed so that each of the candidates would receive the same proportion of electoral votes that he gets in the popular vote? This would mean, for example, that if a candidate gets two-thirds of the popular vote in a state, he would then get two-thirds of the electoral votes of that state.

	Should	Should not	No opinion
August 13-18, 1948	63%	16	20

Today the presidential candidate who gets the most popular votes in a state takes all the electoral votes for that state. Do you think this should be changed so that a candidate who gets, say, a third of the popular votes of a state would get a third of the electoral votes of that state rather than none as at present?

	Should	Should not	No opinion
August 3-8, 1951	57%	21	22

Today, the presidential candidate who gets the most popular votes in a state takes all the electoral votes of that state. Do you think this should or should not be changed so that each of the candidates would receive the same proportion of electoral votes that he gets in the popular vote? This would mean, for example, that if a candidate gets two-thirds of

the popular vote in a state, he would then get two-thirds of the electoral votes of that state.

	Get all electoral votes	Get proportion of votes	No opinion
June 4-9, 1965	28%	57	14
March 2-7, 1960	28%	50	22

Would you approve or disapprove of an amendment to the Constitution which would do away with the electoral college and base the election of a President on the total vote cast throughout the nation?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
November 7-10, 1980	67%	19	15
January 14-17, 1977	73%	15	12

November 16, 2000 – Gallup News Service

Americans Have Long Questioned Electoral College

PRINCETON, NJ -- A new Gallup post-election poll finds close to two in three Americans, 61%, in favor of abolishing the Electoral College system for electing presidents set up by the founding fathers, and replacing it with a direct popular vote. However, while the issue is currently at the center of political controversy swirling around the presidential election, public support for the change is nothing new. Similar majorities have backed this idea in seven surveys dating back to 1966. The greatest level of support, 81%, was recorded after the 1968 election when Richard Nixon defeated Hubert Humphrey in another extremely close election.

While little about the outcome of this year's presidential election is very clear, one of the more likely scenarios, at least initially, was that Republican candidate George W. Bush would lose the popular vote but win the presidency. Perhaps as a result, Republicans currently express more support for the Electoral College system than they did historically. Today, 51% of Republicans favor maintaining the current system while only 44% say they would favor amending the Constitution so the candidate who receives the most total votes nationwide wins the election. By contrast, when last asked in 1980, many more Republicans, 62%, favored shifting to a popular vote system. Similarly, Democrats now indicate more support for the popular vote system than in the past, with 73% favoring it today compared to 66% in 1980.

% Who Favor Basing Presidential Election on Popular Vote

	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
	%	%	%
2000 Nov 11-12	44	62	73
1980 Nov 7-10	62	73	66
1967 Jan 26-31	63	67	53

The amount of education one has also plays a big role in shaping opinion on the Electoral College. People with higher levels of education are less likely to favor changing the way the president is elected.

Thinking for a moment about the way in which the president is elected in this country, which would you prefer -- [ROTATED: to amend the Constitution so the candidate who receives the most total votes nationwide wins the election, (or) to keep the current system, in which the candidate who wins the most votes in the Electoral College wins the election]?

	Total	Post-grad	College grad	Some college	High school or less
Amend the constitution	61%	48	52	63	65
Keep the current system	35%	46	44	34	30

Strong Support for Uniform Election Procedures

The chaos surrounding the Florida election results has highlighted the vast differences in election laws both among states and within states. Under current law, each state has its own set of election laws and is responsible for overseeing its electoral process. A state's ability to design ballots and devolve electoral responsibilities to counties has partly contributed to the Florida controversy. In this case, Palm Beach County had a ballot many voters found confusing, which has sparked repeated calls for recounts and even a new election in that county.

According to a Gallup Poll conducted on Nov. 11-12, 67% of Americans say they would favor federal laws that established uniform ballots and voting procedures across states, while 29% say they think these decisions ought to be left as they are, under state jurisdiction. Younger people are slightly more likely to support uniform election procedures -- 73% of those between the ages of 18 and 29 favor such legislation compared with 66% of those over the age of 50. Although there are still differences by level of education, they are less pronounced than those found in the responses to the Electoral College question. Well-educated Americans are less likely to support uniform election procedures than are those with less education. Liberals and Democrats are also

more likely than Conservatives and Republicans to support such legislation, although a majority of people in each category say they favor standardizing the system.

Which comes closer to your point of view -- [ROTATED: the federal government should pass laws that would establish the same ballots and voting procedures in all states for all presidential elections, (or) decisions on ballot and voting procedures should be left to state and local officials, as is currently the case]?

	EDUCATION				ELECTORAL COLLEGE PREFERENCE	
	Total	Post-grad	College grad	High school or less	Keep Electoral College	Change to popular vote
Federal government should pass laws establishing uniformity in elections	67%	53	70	68	51	77
Decisions on ballot and voting procedures should be left to state and local officials	29%	44	29	27	46	19

	IDEOLOGY			PARTY IDENTIFICATION	
	Conservatives	Moderates	Liberals	Republicans	Democrats
Federal government should pass laws establishing uniformity in elections	61%	67	81	56	78
Decisions on ballot and voting procedures should be left to state and local officials	37%	30	14	42	18

Although the questions about the Electoral College and standardizing election law are somewhat related, supporters of one type of reform do not necessarily support the other type. Those who want to keep the Electoral College split about evenly over whether to standardize election procedures or not (51% in favor and 46% opposed), while those who want to change to the popular vote show overwhelming support for standardizing election procedures, 77% to 19%.

Survey Methods

The most recent survey results reported here are based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,014 adults, 18 years and older, conducted Nov. 11-12, 2000. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

Would you approve or disapprove of an amendment to the Constitution that would do away with the Electoral College and base the election of a president on the total vote cast throughout the nation?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
	%	%	%
1980 Nov 7-10	67	19	14
1977 Jan 14-17	73	15	12
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1968 Sep 1-6	76	13	11
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[From January 5, 2001 article by Frank Newport of Gallup News Service]

Americans Support Proposal to Eliminate Electoral College System

Both chambers of the United States Congress will meet in joint session on Saturday, January 6 in order to carry out Congress' ceremonial task of reading the electoral votes cast by each state, and officially certifying Texas Governor George W. Bush as the next president. In so doing, the House and Senate are following the requirements of Article II of the Constitution, which lays out the procedures by which each state appoints a number of electors, who in turn meet in their respective states and vote for president and vice

president. The Constitution goes on to state that "The president of the Senate shall, in the presence of the Senate and House of Representatives, open all the certificates, and the votes shall then be counted. The person having the greatest number of votes shall be the president, if such number be a majority of the whole number of electors appointed; ... "

This process, which has been carried out in the election of U.S. presidents for over 200 years, says nothing about the popular vote of the citizens of the country, thus leaving the president and vice president as the only elective federal officials not chosen directly by the vote of the people.

The system has generated intense scrutiny this year, only the third time in history in which the winner of the Electoral College (and thus the winner of the presidency) was not also the popular vote winner. Just as Rutherford Hayes and Benjamin Harrison won the presidency while losing the popular vote in 1876 and 1888, respectively, George W. Bush will be taking office this year having lost the popular vote to Al Gore by more than 500,000 votes.

There is little question that the American public would prefer to dismantle the Electoral College system, and go to a direct popular vote for the presidency. In Gallup polls that stretch back over 50 years, a majority of Americans have continually expressed support for the notion of an official amendment of the U.S. Constitution that would allow for direct election of the president.

One of the earliest times in which the public was asked about the Electoral College system was June 1944, just before Franklin Roosevelt's re-election to his fourth term. A Gallup Poll question asked, "It has been suggested that the electoral vote system be discontinued and presidents of the U.S. be elected by total popular vote alone. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?" The answer: 65% of Americans said they favored the proposal, with 23% saying they opposed it, and another 13% saying they had no opinion.

In 1967, the Poll question was modified to focus more explicitly on the idea of a constitutional amendment. The question asked if respondents would approve or disapprove of an amendment to the Constitution that would do away with the Electoral College and "base the election of a president on the total popular vote cast throughout the nation." Fifty-eight percent approved of that proposition, with only 22% disapproving (the rest were unsure).

In May 1968, the percentage favoring a constitutional amendment was 66%, and by November 1968, just after the narrow victory of Richard M. Nixon in the popular vote (despite a more substantial victory in the Electoral College vote), that percentage increased to 80%.

In 1977, 73% approved of such an amendment. In November 1980, the last time until this year that Gallup asked about the Electoral College, 67% of those interviewed approved of a constitutional amendment getting rid of the Electoral College.

This year, Gallup has asked about the Electoral College system twice, with slightly different wording than was used in the past:

Thinking for a moment about the way in which the president is elected in this country, which would you prefer: to amend the Constitution so the candidate who receives the most total votes nationwide wins the election, or to keep the current system, in which the candidate who wins the most votes in the Electoral College wins the election?

	Amend the Constitution	Keep the current system	Both/Neither	No opinion
November 11-12	61%	35	2	2
December 15-17	59%	37	1	3

Support for changing the Constitution this year, although still clearly in the majority, may be down somewhat from previous decades because of an apparent reluctance on the part of Republicans to support the change -- which would have given the presidency this year to Al Gore rather than to George W. Bush. Here is the breakdown of the responses to the question as asked in the December 15-17 poll by party affiliation, and by the groups of voters who say they would support Bush and Gore in a hypothetical 2004 election:

	Amend the Constitution	Keep the current system	Both/Neither	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
Total sample	59	37	1	3
Republicans	41	56	1	2
Independents	57	38	1	4
Democrats	75	22	1	2
Bush voters in 2004	40	57	-	3
Gore voters in 2004	75	22	1	2

The question referred to general changes in the Constitution, with no specific references to the situation in Florida. Still, the fact that there is a 34-percentage-point difference in the level of support for the change between Republicans and Democrats suggests that many respondents may have been thinking about how the system would have worked to their candidate's benefit or detriment this year.

Support for getting rid of the Electoral College is also higher among younger Americans. Sixty-six percent of those 18-29 and 63% of those 30-49 say the system should be amended, compared to only 51% of those 50 years of age and older.

The significant -- and predictable -- variations by party in interest in amending the Constitution suggest that Americans generally understand how the system works. In fact, in a November 13-15 Gallup poll, only about 28% of those interviewed said they didn't understand the Electoral College system well, while 72% said they understood how it works at least "somewhat well."

Many members of Congress, including New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, have announced their support for an amendment to do away with the Electoral College. But despite the fact that about six out of ten Americans support the idea, the real-world chances for the success of such an amendment may not be all that robust, given the high barriers to constitutional change set up by the framers of the Constitution in Article V. Two-thirds of the members of both houses of Congress would have to approve such an amendment, and then three-quarters of the legislatures of the 50 states would have to ratify it in order to change the system to direct election of a president by popular vote.

Survey Methods

Results are based on telephone interviews with 1,011 national adults, aged 18+, conducted December 15-17, 2000. For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the margin of sampling error is +/- 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.