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国際交流員コーナー

CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Election Day

Japan just had its general election on October 27, but there is another big election coming up: the United States presidential election. The main candidates are Vice President Kamala Harris (Democrat) and Former President Donald Trump (Republican). Along with the presidential election, all 435 seats of the House of Representatives and 34 of the 100 seats of the Senate are up for election. In addition, 13 states and territories will be electing a new governor, and there will be many other state and city elections. Since I am American, many people in Japan have been asking me about the election. It's a complicated topic, but this month I'll try to answer a few frequently asked questions.

Q: Can you vote from Japan?

A: Yes!

America has an absentee voting system, so that means all Americans living overseas can vote in federal elections, and even some state and local elections if their former state allows it. The voting method depends on state laws, but most overseas voters can vote by mail, fax, or email.

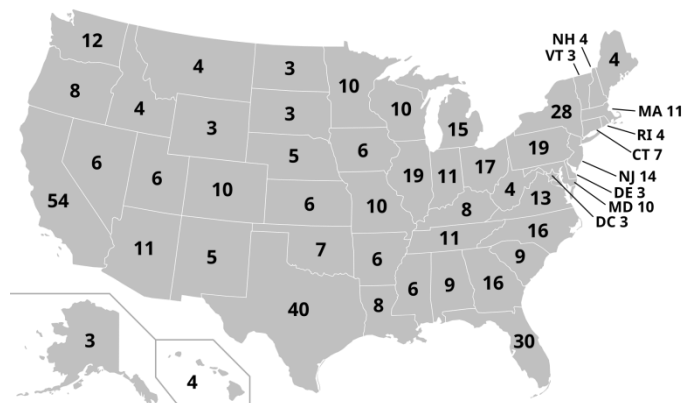
I'll explain the process in my home state of Washington. First, I registered on an official site for overseas voters. A few days later, I got an email from the elections office in the county where I used to live. There was a link to an official voting site. I entered my personal information to confirm my registration, and then there was an online form to select my preferred candidates for president, the Senate, the House of Representatives,

Washington state governor, and other state and city offices. I even was able to vote on various local initiatives. Once I filled in the required fields, I printed my ballot, signed it, took pictures of it with my smartphone, and sent it back to the elections office as an email attachment. A few days later, I got a confirmation email telling me that my vote has been counted. It was so easy!

Q: Is the president elected by popular vote?

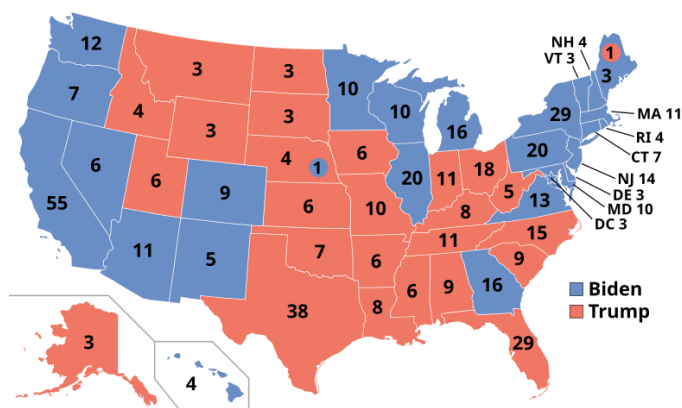
A: No. They are elected by the Electoral College.

Americans vote for whoever they think is the most suitable candidate, but the votes of the Electoral College are what actually elect the president. The number of electoral votes each state gets is equal to the number of senators plus the number of state representatives. Each state has two senators, and the number of representatives is determined by population. Therefore, the states with the lowest populations get only 3 electoral votes, and the higher the population, the more electoral votes. In addition, Washington D.C. is not a state, but it is allocated three electoral votes.



The number of electoral votes allocated to each state for the 2024 election. My home state, Washington, has 12 votes. California has the most at 54 votes.

So how does the Electoral College elect the president? On Election Day, each state has its own election. Voters see the names of the candidates for president and vice president on the ballot, but they are actually voting for a group of electors who were chosen by the candidate's political party in that state. Almost every state uses a "winner takes all" system, so that means the candidate who wins the state's popular vote wins all of the state's electors. Only Maine and Nebraska use a different system, where two electoral votes go to the winner of the popular vote in the state, and one vote is awarded to the winner in each congressional district. That means Maine and Nebraska can split their electoral votes. The total number of electors is 538, and 270 votes are needed to win the presidency.



The 2020 election results. The blue states were won by Biden, and the red states were won by Trump. Biden received 306 electoral votes, while Trump received 232. There are 48 "winner takes all" states, but Maine and Nebraska split their electoral votes.

In almost every election, the winner of the electoral vote and the winner of the popular vote has been the same candidate. However, there have been five times where the winner of the popular vote did not win the election. Two recent examples are the elections in 2000 and 2016. In 2000, Gore beat Bush in the national popular vote, but lost to Bush in Florida by a mere 537 votes. Bush's win in Florida gave him 271 electoral votes, enough to win the election. In 2016, Clinton received more votes nationwide, but Trump bested her in key swing states, and surprisingly won some states that had traditionally leaned Democratic, so he ended up winning the election.

In December, the electors who were decided in November by the presidential election finally cast their votes for president. Before voting, they pledge to vote for

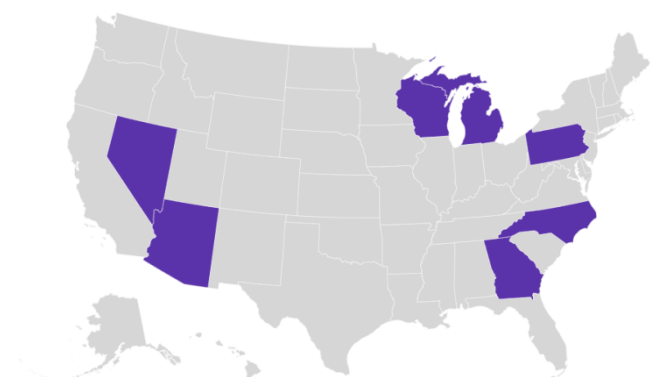
the winning candidate in their state, but they don't always keep their word. In 2016, a record ten "faithless electors" voted for alternative candidates. For example, Clinton won my home state, but of the 12 electors, four refused to vote for her. Many states punish faithless electors by voiding their votes or fining them, but some states allow their votes to be counted. Up until now, faithless electors have never affected the results of the election, but in a neck-and-neck race, anything can happen.

Q: What is a "swing state"?

A: A state where support for both parties is nearly equal, and the winning party "swings" from election to election.

Almost all states lean Republican or Democratic. For example, voters in Southern and Midwestern states tend to vote for Republicans, and voters on the West Coast and in the Northeastern states tend to vote for Democrats. States that vote for the Republican Party are called "red states" and states that vote for the Democratic Party are called "blue states."

However, both Parties have a chance of winning "swing states," also called "battleground states" or "purple states." Instead of campaigning in states that they will easily win or lose, presidential candidates focus almost all of their efforts on the swing states. The "winner takes all" system of the Electoral College means that the swing states determine the results of the election.



The swing states in 2024 are Nevada, Arizona, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Georgia. With a total of 93 electoral votes, winning these states is essential.

Q: Who did you vote for?

A: I won't write that publicly, but I'm from a blue state, so take a guess. ★

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