



MYTH: OTHER MAJOR DEMOCRATIC NATIONS HAVE NOTHING LIKE OUR ELECTORAL COLLEGE

Many Americans believe that the United States is an outlier among major democratic nations because we do not directly elect our chief executive and a candidate who did not receive the most votes can win. In fact, many major nations have similar systems.

In most major democratic nations, voters elect members of the national legislature which then elects a prime minister. The public has no direct vote for the head of government. (Some of these nations also maintain a hereditary monarch as head of state.)

Voters in these countries often know who a party will elect as prime minister (the leader of the winning party), but not always. In 2018, Giuseppe Conte became prime minister of Italy as part of a coalition government despite not being the leader of any party.

The leadership of these nations can also switch without a general election. In Australia, four prime ministers in the last decade have taken office after winning internal party leadership contests instead of leading their party to an electoral victory, and four out of the past six British prime ministers took office the same way.

Minority-led governments are not unusual in democratic nations either. In 2019, the Conservative Party in Canada won the most votes (it won extremely large margins in two provinces), but the Liberal Party had broader support throughout the rest of the country and won more seats in Parliament, allowing it to re-elect Justin Trudeau as prime minister. Other countries have had similar outcomes in recent decades, including Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

The Electoral College, like the systems of most democratic nations, provides a two-step, geographically distributed election process for choosing our head of government. And just like in those other systems, this occasionally allows a winner who did not receive a majority or plurality of the popular vote. Compared with the systems of these other democratic nations, however, the Electoral College is more democratic.

KEY POINTS

- Most of the world's major democracies have systems where the public elects members of the national legislature who then elect a prime minister.
- Coalition governments and internal party leadership fights in these nations regularly replace chief executives without voters participating in the process.
- Other democratic nations have had chief executives whose parties finished with fewer popular votes than their rivals, including Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

HOW THE TOP 20 MOST POPULOUS O.E.C.D. COUNTRIES SELECT THEIR LEADERS

Country	Population (State Comparison)	Chief Executive
United States	331,208,717	Election by electoral college
Mexico	127,792,286 (3x California)	Direct election
Japan	125,960,000 (3x California)	Election by legislature
Germany	83,166,711 (2x California)	President elected by electoral college, Chancellor elected by legislature
France	67,098,000 (2x Texas)	Direct election
United Kingdom	66,796,807 (2x Texas)	Election by legislature
Italy	60,244,639 (2x Texas)	Election by legislature
South Korea	51,780,579 (2x Florida)	Direct election
Colombia	50,372,424 (2x Florida)	Direct election
Spain	46,329,981 (2x Florida)	Election by legislature
Poland	38,356,000 (California)	Direct election
Canada	38,134,663 (California)	Election by legislature
Australia	25,646,039 (Florida)	Election by legislature
Chile	19,458,310 (New York)	Direct election
Netherlands	17,497,581 (New York)	Election by legislature
Belgium	11,528,375 (Ohio)	Election by legislature
Greece	10,724,599 (Georgia)	Election by legislature
Czech Republic	10,694,364 (Georgia)	Direct election
Sweden	10,348,730 (North Carolina)	Election by legislature
Portugal	10,295,909 (North Carolina)	Direct election

Election data from *The World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency.