Paths to 270

How voter coalitions become electoral votes

SS24.USG.11a "Outline how the Electoral College functions and explain how candidates must appeal to a wide variety of states and develop coalitions in order to secure the electoral votes required to win the presidency."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the steps that turn votes into an Electoral College victory, circle the voter groups, and number two reasons a campaign must compete in different states.

Building a Path to the Presidency

1. On election night, a candidate may win more votes nationwide and still lose the presidency. That is because voters choose a president through the Electoral College, not through a single national vote total. Each state has electors equal to its number of U.S. representatives plus its two senators; Washington, D.C., has three electors. There are 538 electoral votes in all, so a candidate needs at least 270 to win. In nearly every state, the candidate who wins the statewide popular vote receives all its electoral votes. Maine and Nebraska instead can award some electors by congressional district.

2. Imagine a campaign with limited time and money. It cannot assume that a landslide in one state makes up for losses everywhere else: a larger margin within that state usually brings no extra electoral votes. It might visit a competitive state with a large number of electors, then spend time in several smaller competitive states whose votes could add up. The campaign studies state polling and past turnout, but neither guarantees a win. Its aim is to assemble enough state results to reach 270, not simply to attract the largest possible national vote total.

3. A coalition is made of voters, not states: it is a set of groups whose support can help a candidate win across multiple states. A candidate might discuss housing costs with younger renters, health care with older adults, and water supplies with farmers. Those groups can live in many states, and individuals may care about more than one issue. A message that fits only one region or group could leave other competitive states out of reach. Candidates must connect different concerns to a shared program while earning enough support in states with different populations and electoral vote totals.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Outline how a candidate can turn voters' choices in states into an Electoral College victory.

2. Why might a campaign visit several smaller competitive states instead of trying to increase its winning margin in one state?

3. How do Maine and Nebraska qualify the usual strategy of winning a state's statewide popular vote?

4. Why does the passage call a coalition a set of voters rather than a set of states, and how can that coalition help a candidate win?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose two states other than Maine and Nebraska. In 70 to 100 words, name two voter groups, propose an issue appeal for each, and explain how support across those states could help a candidate build toward 270 electoral votes.

ANSWER KEY

Paths to 270

GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.11a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the steps that turn votes into an Electoral College victory, circle the voter groups, and number two reasons a campaign must compete in different states. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Outline how a candidate can turn voters' choices in states into an Electoral College victory.	**Win enough votes to receive electoral votes from states and reach at least 270 of the 538 electoral votes. In nearly every state, the statewide popular vote winner receives all its electoral votes.**
2	Why might a campaign visit several smaller competitive states instead of trying to increase its winning margin in one state?	**Several state victories could add electoral votes toward 270, while a larger margin in a state the candidate already wins usually adds none.**
3	How do Maine and Nebraska qualify the usual strategy of winning a state's statewide popular vote?	**They can award some electors by congressional district, so winning the statewide vote does not necessarily give a candidate every electoral vote in either state.**
4	Why does the passage call a coalition a set of voters rather than a set of states, and how can that coalition help a candidate win?	**A coalition consists of voter groups, such as renters, older adults, and farmers. Their support can help a candidate win votes in multiple states and collect the electoral votes needed for victory.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In Michigan, I would emphasize job training for auto workers; in Arizona, I would emphasize access to loans for small-business owners. Both groups live in both states, so I would present these policies as parts of one plan for economic stability. With support from these voters and others in each state, the candidate might win both statewide popular votes and receive those states' electoral votes. Victories elsewhere would still be needed to reach 270.

Accept other accurate explanations that distinguish voter coalitions from state victories. For the open task, look for two distinct voter groups, relevant issue appeals, and a clear link from statewide wins to electoral votes toward 270.