Senate Skew Research

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In American public and academics both, the debate surrounding the Electoral College, whether it serves as a true representation of the people’s choice for president or directly electing the president through popular voting is more accurate, has remained controversial and highly argued. In the past 20 years, the debate has widened exceptionally owing to the difference between electoral college votes and popular votes in the 2000 and 2016 Presidential election. The later saw President Trump winning by 74 electoral votes despite Hilary Clinton winning the popular vote. Nevertheless, the Electoral College has its share of supporters who see it is a vital instrument in allowing the two-party-system to function. Many believe that it keeps the best interest of the people in consideration, with knowledgeable and educated electors, which allows educated choices to be made in the political system and preventing the influence of the politically unaware, or uneducated citizens. The Electoral College itself is made up of 538 electors who cast votes to decide the President and Vice-President of the United States. The number of electors that a States receive is equal to the amount of the state’s congressional delegation # of House of Representatives + 2-Senators. For example, Georgia has 14 house reps + 2 senators = 16 total Electoral College votes. A key aspect of the Electoral College voting system is the ‘Senate Skew’ which refers to the additional two votes granted to each state according to their representation in the Senate. These two votes have been specifically significant in two election outcomes, in 1916 and the year 2000, wherein they influenced the presidential election outcomes, consequently leading to a win for Evans Hughes and a loss for Al Gore in 2000.

Despite the disparities that we see today, the framers of the American political system took pride in developing the voting system, although they too differed with regards to certain aspects. Goldstein (1996) suggests that the founding fathers witnessed events and arguments that led them to reconsider the voting system at several occasions. Alexander Hamilton, once a proponent of the popular vote later conceded to the argument that such as a highly regarded office holder must be voted in through highly regarded, capable and intelligent citizens. Similarly, James Madison and Gouverneur Morris favored direct elections, viewing it as a more democratic option after finding it suitable for governor elections[[1]](#footnote-1). However even then, elected executive officials and state legislate would moderate the ballot from individual votes. A similar view was expressed by George Mason and other contemporaries that directly electing the president requires the American public to be politically educated, and the vast region of the U.S. makes it difficult for people to have adequate information about candidates from different parts of the nation, to be able to make the right decision. Thus, many among the American Founding Fathers viewed Electoral College votes to be a more practical and safer option to elect capable and well-read people to hold this important office[[2]](#footnote-2). The electors, who are members of the Electoral College, are appointed by state legislatures in any way they deem suitable. In the 18th century, many U.S. states such as Pennsylvania, Delaware and Virginia appointed these electors through a popular election, whereas New Hampshire and Massachusetts combined legislative selection with popular election[[3]](#footnote-3). Other states allowed their legislature to select the electors who created a general ticket system, in which the party which dominates the state would be accorded the entire electoral vote of the state. However, Dixon (1950) highlights that the Electoral College system remained effective and uncontroversial only for the first presidential elections. As national political parties developed in the 18th century, the Democratic Republicans and the Federalists, it posed new challenges for the Electoral College. Electors began to exhibit partisan loyalty to a certain party instead of serving as independent actors. This was first witnessed in the 1800 presidential election in which Burr and Jefferson who both belonged to the same party acquired equal votes from the electors loyal to their party, and Jefferson was later elected by a voting held by the House of Representatives[[4]](#footnote-4). The tie reflected a problem within the electoral system that the framers of the system did not anticipate.

Today, the system of American presidential election drives candidates to concentrate their campaigns on states that form the majority of electoral votes, and thus critical in securing a victory. Certain states are classified as battleground or swing states in which there is focused attention in the form of television advertisements, candidate appearance and public mobilization efforts compared to other non-swing states that are considered non-competitive and consequently receive little campaign activity. Goux and Hopkins (2008) based his study examining the claims of reformists in the system who see the Electoral College as a distorting factor in the democratic process, as it incentivizes the candidates to only focus politically on states deemed as competitive, thereby ignoring a sizeable portion of the nation. Examining the claim that the process is non-democratic, Goux and Hopkins (2008) empirically evaluate the assertion by different critics in light of their argument that the electoral college impacts the political campaign strategy. In their study, Goux and Hopkins (2008) examined evidence to support the purported shortcomings and compared the results to a scenario featuring a direct popular election. They suggest that a reform of the Electoral College may not bring practical or substantial benefits to the political system, in terms of democratizing it further, however, the phenomenon of battleground or swing states does impact certain voter classes and puts others at a disadvantage. It is found that even if the electoral college is abolished for a direct popular voting system, evidence suggests that the strategic targeting of certain voters in particular areas is likely to continue. Thus, many critics of the Electoral College may not see substantial results from introducing reforms as the degree of campaign attention may still vary across regions, which is likely to continue even under the possibility of a direct popular election[[5]](#footnote-5). Grofman and Brunell (1997) found similar results with swing states, as they examined the assertion by some that the Electoral College favors the Republican party. In the Electoral College, bias is understood to be different than swing ratio. The later refers to the effect of the popular vote in producing a responsiveness of change in the Electoral College whereas the former refers to an asymmetry in electoral votes that different candidates or parties acquire[[6]](#footnote-6). Furthermore, it was found that the swing ratio in the Electoral College has underwent a dramatic increase over the decades which may be a result of a decrease in the statistical partisan distribution of electoral votes in various states. The difference in the swing ratio is explained as a consequence of a diminishing difference between variations among the Non-South and South regions in terms of electoral responsiveness. Grofman and Brunell (1997) explain the translation of votes into a seat share in the electoral college through establishing the relationship between bias and swing affect in determining electoral seat share. The swing ratio remains high in the electoral college in states especially near the fifty percent vote share point. The winner-take-all nature of the Electoral college which causes a bias in the seats to vote relationship, as well as uneven support for the Democratic party across different regions determine that the Electoral College does not have an inherent pro-Republican bias. Moreover, Grofman and Brunell (1997) suggest that partisan bias in favor of either the Republicans or Democrats is not significant statistically across the nation, in recent decades although there is a certain tendency for the bias to incline towards the Democratic side in the near future. The phenomena of Swing States is also identified by Stromberg (2008) who suggests ways in which presidential candidates could mobilize resources to increase their chances of winning in such states where the Swing ratio is high. Stromberg (2008) estimates the competition in the Electoral College system by offering a probabilistic-voting model that explains the different factors which impact Electoral College votes. One of the findings is that more resources should be allocated to states in campaigns that are considered decisive swing states. Moreover, Stromberg (2008) suggests that the extent of swing ration in a decisive state is a result of the ‘voting power’ of the state multiplied by the number of voters and the conditional marginal voter density of the state in case of a tie. Importantly, the chances that a state is among the list of decisive swing states is roughly proportional to the total electoral college votes it has[[7]](#footnote-7). Another factor that increased the likelihood for swing per electoral vote is the outcome of the forecasted state election that lies between the forecasted national election outcome and a draw. The allocation of resources can be concentrated to precise state-election forecasts, and that any candidate lagging in the forecasts must concentrate on increasing the variance in electoral votes. Such a candidate can increase his or her chances by spending greater time in relatively larger states, in which they are also behind, and lesser time in those states where the polls suggest a victory. Powell (2004) discusses ways in which presidential candidates can enhance their support in key states that are likely to affect Electoral College outcomes by strategically selecting the location where their national-party convention sites would be appropriate and their choice of vice-president. Powell (2004) is of the view that there are significant electoral benefits to be obtained in the home regions and states of a vice president candidate while there are less significant benefits to host a convention in states where the governorship is controlled by the same party. The advantages provided by home states can potentially change the outcome of close and competitive races, even when regionalism and localism is perceived to be on the decline. Furthermore, Powell (2004) found that significant benefits are found in hosting conventions in states that are generally governed by the opposing party when it comes to conventions. It is also important to enhance voter shares in states where the electoral college votes prefer the opposing party or candidate.

Furthermore, Stormberg (2008) also analyses whether a direct national popular vote would effect a change in presidential elections. He concludes that the two different electoral systems are influenced by different factors; Swing voters and voter turnout in popular votes, whereas decisive swing states in the case of Electoral College votes, which ultimately determine which states or likely to lose or gain candidate attention. In contrast with Goux and Hopkins (2008), Stormberg (2008) views that that the Electoral College system inherently encourages presidential candidates to distribute their attention towards states unequally, depending on the probability of whether they are decisive swing states or not. It is understandable why the Electoral College system is not favored by either minorities or smaller states.

Warf (2009) argues that the winner-take-all approach favored by the Electoral College itself creates biases in voter power by differentially punishing or rewarding voters on the basis of that state’s electorate or overall population. Hence, Warf (2009) proceeds to provide an overview of the different nature of biases, such as the geographic bias, that is introduced by the Electoral system. The geographic dynamics at play are able to significantly influence the presidential election outcomes that ultimately binds up the American voter’s ability to change the outcome of the election[[8]](#footnote-8). Moreover, Spatial biases are generic to its organization rather than idiosyncratic. The size of electoral blocs, the location of the voters, the overall victory margin in the states all influence the relative voter power among different states in the presidential race to ultimately influence the outcome of the election. Thus Warf (2009) also disagrees with Goux and Hopkins (2008) and sees the Electoral College system to be fundamentally illiberal and antidemocratic owing to the uneven geographies of voter power it generates. Analyzing the presidential elections between 1960 to 2004, Warf (2009) finds that over time, the relative voter power underwent marked variations among different states. The voter power was not necessarily based on the overall state’s size but on a variety of complex factors influenced by the winner-take-all dynamics created by the system and the margin of victory in various states. Here Warf (2009) along with Grofman and Brunell (1997) agree on the fact that the Electoral College does not concentrate the voting power of a single group or party, with exceptions of concentrated metropolitan regions, therefore any assertion that the Electoral College is Pro-republican or that it only exists to protect the interests of white men is unfounded. Voter power is a complex, ephemeral, unpredictable, transitory and highly contingent phenomena, however the characteristic winner-takes-all approach of the Electoral College still manages to create certain spatial distortions which work to enhance power of voters from one state over voters from the other.

In the 2000 elections, most media reports that discussed the role of the Electoral College in determining the strategies and outcome of the election concentrated their discussion on the popular vote versus the electoral vote margin. Hill and McKee (2005) take a precise look at the election results by examining the different ways how the Electoral College affected turnout. The effect of resource allocation as a result of the battleground or swing status of the states, and how it affected turnout. Moreover, candidate visits and media spending is analyzed in non-swing states compared to battleground states, to observe whether they impacted overall state turnout. The findings suggested that political parties and their candidates focused more on media spending and visits on certain states that they perceived to be pivotal to the electoral college voting outcome, as Stromberg (2008) also suggested[[9]](#footnote-9). Furthermore, it was found that a wide variety of factors affect state-level turnout which includes registration laws, state elections, demographics, party competition and the ideology of political elites of the state and those participating in the presidential race. In order to secure maximum Electoral College Votes, candidates preferred to utilize major portions of their resources to campaign in battleground or swing states, effectively ignoring states where the results were nearly certain. This led to uneven campaign efforts which in turn affected turnout. A higher turnout, on the other hand is achieved through face-to-face contact, reaching out to supporters, and campaigning directly, however, concentrating resources into swing states was found to create higher turnout compared to states that were not battleground states.

According to Katz and Gelman (2002), the US presidential election of 2000 once again renewed interest in possible democratic reform including the Electoral College elimination. Agreeing with Goux and Hopkins (2008), they find that the college system could be possibly flawed in two fundamental ways. First, it may be biased and in favor of one party. Which means the distribution of votes result in the winning of the popular vote by a party's candidate but losing Electoral College. For instance, if it is possible that the Democratic candidate wins the majority seats in few states and will lift the Democratic share but not the chances for them to win the Electoral College. The second influence of Electoral College is on the individual's voting power, i.e., on their result. Power of a vote can be measured from the fact that it determines the outcome of an election. On the other hand, the electorate is divided into predetermined coalitions by the Electoral College. All of the electoral votes of the state are given to the candidate having a majority vote in the state. Therefore, a vote is essential if it determines how electoral votes are being cast winner in Electoral College is determined by these electoral votes. All the arguments against Electoral College are either founded on highly stylized formal models or on anecdotal evidence from certain elections. A different approach is being adapted here. In the study, historical election results are used to develop a set of different statistical models for the evaluation of the Electoral College and its performance. It was revealed that when such an analysis is performed, there is not much base to argue for improvement of Electoral College. The study also reveals that when appropriate statistical analysis of historical elections data is performed, there is no basis to argue for improving Electoral College. The study initially shows that given the current distribution of voters, Electoral College may have been biased once against the Democrats but none of the party is benefited by the system. In addition, when the average vote shares get closer to the half, electoral vote will be different from that of the popular vote. Speaking of the voting power, authors show the existence of temporal variation in the voting power from past numerous decades, under a popular voting system of presidency election, the individual citizen’s voting power would not likely increase. Authors found that there is a possibility for Electoral College system to lead to results different than the popular vote, however the only condition for this is that the nationwide vote is closer for the top two contestants. From the election of 2002, it is known that when elections are closer a minimum difference in the process of a voting changes the outcomes. Examining the empirical voting behavior, there is no as such difference explored between the voting power under popular vote system or Electoral College. However, these results are more indefinite, because the analysis is based on assumption that under a popular voting system, neither candidate nor voters would have performed differently.

Some of the findings from recent studies such as Wharf (2009) can be found in earlier mathematical studies that analyzed the discrimination present within the Electoral College System. Banzhaf (1968) suggests that voters from middle-sized and smaller states are at a disadvantage as an excessive voting power is allotted to larger states by the present Electoral College voting system. Thus, compared to smaller states, citizens of California and New York are almost two to three times more likely to influence the Presidential election outcome. Thus, disparities between 100-200% are observable and not uncommon. Along with the District of Columbia, there are 32 states in which the citizens have an average voting power of less than average. However, any proportional plans that aim to provide citizens of smaller sized states compared to medium and large size states provide excessively high voting power to them, and often provide citizens of Alaska and Nevada four times more power to influence the election than California or New York[[10]](#footnote-10). Thus, a disparity could go as high as 400% in such a case, and give 95% of the overall population a voting power less than average. Other plans have been suggested that involve each state electing two college electors from each district, but that also puts citizens of middle sized and larger states at a disadvantage. Furthermore, in case each district would have an identical population, even then states that would have lower overall populations would begin to enjoy considerable advantage over larger states, and would put nearly 90% of the population below average voting power. From the findings, Banzhaf (1968) suggest that any subsequent reforms to the Electoral College system may not be able to reduce inequalities and may in fact lead to further exacerbation.

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