THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION NUMBERS GAME: PRIMARIES/CAUCUSES AND THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

CIVEC/US SPECIALIZATION/WHOSONTHEBALLLOT.ORG
GUEST LECTURE ON PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Robert Y. Shapiro, Columbia University and The Academy of Political Science
Marianna Palumbo, The Academy of Political Science

October 29, 2019
NUMBERS GAME: THE ARITHMETIC OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY AND GENERAL ELECTION

• Counting Votes and Democratic and Republican Party Delegates in Primaries and Caucuses
• Counting the Popular Vote and the Electoral Vote in the General Election
PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES

Chronological Cumulative Delegate Counts
A Candidate Needs to Win a Majority of Delegates Who Will Vote for the Candidate at the Democratic and Republican Party National Conventions
(Will come back later to how the parties at the outset determine the numbers of delegates)
THE IMPORTANCE OF “MOMENTUM”: THE ELECTIONS SINCE 2008
CUMULATIVE DELEGATE COUNT IN DEMOCRATIC PRIMARIES, 2008

- 4,418 total delegate votes
- 3,566 pledged delegates
- 852 unpledged delegates
- 2,210 delegate votes needed to nominate
CUMULATIVE DELEGATE COUNT IN DEMOCRATIC PRIMARIES, 2016

- 4,763 total delegate votes
- 4,051 pledged delegates
- 712 unpledged delegates
- 2,382 delegate votes needed to nominate
CUMULATIVE DELEGATE COUNT IN REPUBLICAN PRIMARIES, 2008

- 2,516 total delegate votes
- 1,189 pledged delegates
- 561 unpledged delegates
- 1,191 delegate votes needed to nominate
CUMULATIVE DELEGATE COUNT IN REPUBLICAN PRIMARIES, 2012

- 2,286 total delegate votes
- 1,871 pledged delegates
- 415 unpledged delegates
- 1,144 delegate votes needed to nominate
CUMULATIVE DELEGATE COUNT IN REPUBLICAN PRIMARIES, 2016

- 2,472 total delegate votes
- 2,363 pledged delegates
- 109 unpledged delegates
- 1,273 delegate votes needed to nominate
THE 2020 ELECTION

• Voting and Delegate Allocation Rules Matter
• Open or Closed Primaries? Whether Independents Can Vote? Whether All Voters Can Participate?
• Delegates Are Allocated Proportionately in the Democratic Party Primaries to All Candidate Receiving at Least 15 percent of the Vote.
• Republicans Have More “Winner Take All” Primaries as in the Past
DEMOCRATIC RULES FOR INDEPENDENT PARTICIPATION

[Map showing voters allowed to participate in elections across the United States.]
REPUBLICAN RULES ON DELEGATE DISTRIBUTION AND INDEPENDENT PARTICIPATION
2020 DISTRIBUTION OF DEMOCRATIC DELEGATES (OMITTING THE REPUBLICANS ASSUMING PRESIDENT TRUMP WILL BE THEIR NOMINEE)

- The Call for the 2020 Democratic National Convention mandates:
  - A base of 3,200 delegate votes is distributed among the 50 states and DC according to a formula that gives consideration to the three most recent presidential elections and the population by electoral vote:

\[
A = \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{SDV 2008 + SDV 2012 + SDV 2016}{TDV 2008 + TDV 2012 + TDV 2016} + \frac{SEV}{538} \right)
\]

- Any state with a primary or caucus in April 2020 receives a 10 percent add-on of the base delegate vote.
- Any state with a primary or caucus between 1 May and 16 June 2020 receives a 20 percent add-on of the base delegate vote.
- Any state with a primary or caucus that is held in a regional cluster receives a 15 percent add-on of the base delegate vote.

- Allocation Factor
- SDV = State Democratic Vote
- SEV = State Electoral Vote
- TDV = Total Democratic Vote

A = Allocation Factor
DISTRIBUTION OF DELEGATE VOTES CONTINUED

- 15 percent of the base delegate votes shall be added to the number of votes allocated to represent pledged Party and Elected Official delegates.

- American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and the Virgin Islands each receive six at-large delegate votes.

- Democrats Abroad receive 12 at-large and one pledged Party and Elected Official delegate votes.

- Puerto Rico receives 44 base delegate votes.
• Automatic votes are allocated to each state to accommodate the members of the DNC from that state in which they reside.

• Automatic votes are allocated to the following in the states in which they reside: Democratic President, Democratic Vice President, all former Democratic Presidents and Vice Presidents, all former Democratic Leaders of the Senate, all former Democratic Speakers of the House and Democratic Minority Leaders, and all former Chairpersons of the DNC.
# 2020 Primaries and Caucuses

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## 2020 Primaries and Caucuses

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- **13–16 July 2020: Democratic National Convention**
  - 4,744 total delegate votes
  - 3,978 pledged delegates
  - 766 unpledged delegates
  - 1,990 delegate votes needed to nominate on first ballot
  - 2,373 delegate votes needed to nominate on subsequent ballots

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WILL CANDIDATE “MOMENTUM” PLAY OUT AS IN THE PAST FOR THE DEMOCRATS?

• Implications of Proportional Voting and Uncommitted (“Superdelegates” Not Permitted to Vote on the First Ballot)

• Depends on Whether More than Two Candidate Can Consistently Win at Least 15 percent of the Vote and Prevent One Candidate from Winning a Majority for the First Ballot at the Convention. What Happens Then? Will the Vote Be Considered “democratic”?

• Current Polling on the Election? (See realclearpolitics.com)

• The Six Debates from January-April 2020 May Be Crucial
GENERAL ELECTION: THE ELECTORAL VOTE VS. THE POPULAR VOTE SINCE THE 1992 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Electoral College Maps
THE NUMBER OF ELECTORAL VOTES EACH STATE HAS IS EQUAL TO ITS NUMBER OF SENATORS AND HOUSE MEMBERS, WITH THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA HAVING THREE ELECTORAL VOTES
THE CANDIDATE WITH A MAJORITY OF THE ELECTORAL VOTE (270 OR MORE OUT OF 538) WINS THE PRESIDENCY. IF THERE IS NO WINNER, THE DECISION ON THE PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT GOES TO THE HOUSE AND THE SENATE.

THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE?
THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE MAP
AND THE RECENT HISTORY OF THE DEMOCRATS “BLUE WALL”
1992 Actual

538 Total Electoral Votes
Clinton = 370
Bush = 168
1996 Actual

538 Total Electoral Votes
Clinton = 379
Dole = 159
537 Total Electoral Votes
Gore = 266
Bush = 271
537 Total Electoral Votes
Kerry = 251
Bush = 286
538 Total Electoral Votes

Obama = 365

McCain = 173
538 Total Electoral Votes
Obama = 332
Romney = 206
THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE IS NOT “DEMOCRATIC”

• And what happens if no candidate gets a majority of the Electoral Vote
• The House of Representatives Selects the President (How?...)
• The Senate Selects the Vice President (How?...)
• What Was the Original Purpose of the Electoral College?
• How to Get Rid of the Electoral College? By Constitutional Amendment. Or by “The National Popular Vote Bill.”
THE NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE BILL

• The bill would ensure that every vote counts equally.

• The Presidential candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states and DC would win the Presidency.

• The bill was first introduced in 2005, but the debate over whether to eliminate the Electoral College reignited after the 2016 general election.

  • Hillary Clinton won approximately 3 million more votes nationwide, but ultimately lost the election to Donald Trump, who won 306 of the total 538 electoral votes.

  • State winner-take-all laws and the Electoral College have allowed five presidents to enter office despite losing the popular vote.
• The bill has been enacted in 16 states since 2006—comprising of 196 electoral votes.
  • The bill will take effect when enacted by states with 74 more electoral votes (for a total of 270 out of 538).
• After the bill comes into effect, each individual voter in all states will acquire a direct vote in the choice of all of the presidential electors from all of the states that enacted the compact.
• The bill is considered to be a state-based approach that maintains state control over how the President is elected and retains the Electoral College.
  • Electors still determine the general election, but states will shift the way in which electors are allocated (by national popular vote v. winner-take-all).
ARGUMENTS FOR
THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

• Contributes to the country's cohesiveness
  • No one geographic region dominates the electoral college with an absolute majority (270 electoral votes)

• Enhances the status of minority groups
  • The minority votes can make a difference between a candidate winning all of a state's electoral votes or none of them
  • Ethnic minority groups tend to concentrate in states with a high number of electors, meaning their votes are particularly important to candidates.
ARGUMENTS FOR
THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE (CONTINUED)

• Contributes to national political stability
  • Encourages a two-party system
  • Prevents a transitory third-party from winning the presidency

• Maintains a federal system
  • The electoral college was designed to represent each state’s choice for president.
  • This system prioritizes state viewpoints over those of political minorities.
  • The importance of collective opinions of state populations outweigh those of the national population when taken as a whole
ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

• Electing a minority President
  • Electoral votes are split in a way that no candidate reaches the necessary majority
  • One candidate’s popular support is heavily concentrated in a few states, while another candidate maintained a popular lead in enough states to win a majority of electors
  • A third party candidate draws enough votes from the top two that no candidate receives 50 percent of the national popular total
• “Faithless Electors”
  • An elector who pledges to vote for their party’s presidential candidate, but ultimately votes for another candidate
ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE (CONTINUED)

- Depressing voter turnout
  - Each state maintains the same number of electoral votes regardless of voter turnout. Thus, there is no incentive to encourage participation in the election.

- Failure to reflect the national popular will
  - The distribution of electoral votes over represents rural states.
  - The winner-take-all method of awarding electoral votes (the candidate with the most popular votes in the state wins the electors) makes it difficult for third-party candidates to be represented in the electoral college.


• Anna Staver, “A repeal of Colorado’s new national popular vote law appears headed to the November 2020 ballot,” The Denver Post, 22 July 2019.


• Every Vote Counts Amendment, HJ Res 8, 109th Congress, 1st sess. (January 4, 2005).


• Kristina Dell, The Electoral College Explained, bxscience.edu

