

The Presidential Election Numbers Game: Primaries/Caucuses and the Electoral College

Introduction
ESTER FUCHS

Speaker
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On 29 October 2019, Who's on the Ballot, the Urban and Social Policy Concentration, the U.S. Regional Specialization, and the CiVEC organization hosted a guest lecture on presidential elections at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. Presentation slides from this lecture are available at <https://www.psqonline.org/events.cfm?IDEvent=27>.

ESTER FUCHS: Welcome, thank you all for coming tonight to hear Bob Shapiro speak on the presidential election numbers game—primaries, caucuses, and the Electoral College. This evening is sponsored by Who's on the Ballot, SIPA's Urban and Social Policy Concentration, US Regional Specialization, and the SIPA CiVEC organization. We want to thank our sponsors. This really came together because students requested this event. Everybody really wanted to know more about caucuses, primaries, and the Electoral College. We have 60 percent international students at SIPA and it is safe to say that no one else has an electoral college, and it should be something we think a bit more about.

It is my great pleasure to introduce Robert Y. Shapiro. He is a professor and former chair of the Political Science Department here at Columbia and a member of the School of International and Public Affairs faculty. He has many accomplishments, so I cannot really go through all of them. But, for those of you who do not know him, I want to share a couple of things that are relevant to this evening. First, Bob was elected a fellow to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He has received a distinguished Columbia faculty award and an Outstanding Achievement Award from the New York Chapter of the American Association for Public Opinion Research. He is an expert in American politics, public opinion, and statistical methods. Just putting all of that out on the table, it is pretty clear that we have one of the foremost experts in American politics and public opinion in the world right here speaking to us today.

He has so many books and articles that I cannot really name them all. However, my favorite two, *The Rational Public*, a really important book, and of course, *Politicians Don't Pander*. Bob is currently also the President of the Academy of Political Science and serves on a whole bunch of editorial boards for academic journals. He received his B.A. from MIT and his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. That is where I met Bob Shapiro. We were both graduate students at the University of Chicago and my respect for you, Bob, is so deep and so great. Not just as a scholar, an academic, and a thinker, but as a person. For those of you who know Bob, you know he is an extraordinary colleague and friend. I feel very lucky to introduce him to you all today.

ROBERT Y. SHAPIRO: Ester, thank you for the very kind introduction. Your reward for that is that I will not share what year we met in graduate school. I am delighted to be here tonight and

by way of an important acknowledgement, I had assistance from a research assistant at the Academy of Political Science, Marianna Palumbo. She and I have been doing some writing on this, and one of our articles is posted on the Academy website. It is related to our prediction, if you will—and I have said this before, but I say it now with a little more assertiveness—that there is a good chance that the Democrats may not wind up with a candidate who receives a majority of the delegates on the first ballot at the National Convention. I will come back to that. I have said this before, the current numbers are playing out in a certain way, and there is a certain tentativeness about the candidates. Things could get very interesting come July in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This talk is actually about a fairly boring subject. It is about election arithmetic—the selection of presidential candidates and the selection of the president through the Electoral College. It is a big numbers game and counting is very important in legislative politics these days. Look at Nancy Pelosi counting the number of members of Congress who would vote for impeachment. The Senate calculation is a little easier at the moment.

Before we get to the numbers, there are important themes and ideas that pervade this process. One has to do with the fact that none of this is codified in law nor in the United States Constitution. Secondly, there is nothing that says that these processes at work are democratic. In fact, the intention of the Founding Fathers was to create a democratic republic and only a democratic republic in so far that voters elected members of the House of Representatives. Everyone else was elected through some indirect means and not directly by the people. That is a theme that pervades all of this.

Then there are some oddities about the process. Take the early primaries and caucuses—the two big ones are in Iowa and New Hampshire. They are hardly representative of the entire United States, and I will come back to that shortly. We are talking about counting votes, delegates, members of the Electoral College, etc.

Now, let us start by talking about primaries and caucuses—the processes by which the parties select their presidential candidates. I do not have time to go throughout the whole history of this system, but I can answer any questions about that during the Q&A period at the end. The way that the presidential selection system is set up is that the parties select their nominees for the presidency. In the old days, whether people view them as the good old days or the bad old days, the parties selected their candidates behind closed doors, in the smoke filled back rooms. If we did the same thing today, the only difference would be that the back rooms would be smokeless rather than smoke filled. The electorate did not have much say in the process.

Now, fast forward—we are glossing over a lot of history about how primaries were introduced during the progressive reform period in the late nineteenth century and how they increased in number later on. Especially within the Democratic Party, and only fitting within the *Democratic* Party, there were forces at work that wanted to make the process much more democratic. That is, the process by which voters and the people selected the candidates. The key reforms are known as the McGovern-Fraser Reforms. These led us to the current system by which primary elections and caucuses weigh in heavily and exclusively in the selection of delegates in both parties. In terms of how democratic these systems are, they are somewhat more democratic, only fittingly, in the Democratic Party rather than the Republican Party, and I will come back to that.

Now the voters have a greater say, and the electorate is much more expansive than it was during the days of the Founders. Women got the vote. Young adults got the vote. There is the

expansion of guaranteed rights of voting amongst minorities. That aspect of the process is a lot more democratic.

Let us get to the heart of the matter. Political scientists have a lot to say about how this process plays out—the primaries, caucuses, and selection of candidates. The idea of momentum is very important. That is, these early primaries and caucuses in late February, and a big day on 3 March, are associated with the expectation that one candidate will pull ahead. By pulling ahead, he will gain momentum. That candidate, just by virtue of winning, will get more public attention and will drive money towards him or her as the result of success. As the old saying goes, “don’t make no waves, don’t back no losers.” People want to put their money on a good bet.

You need to get your bearings here, so I have a number of graphs to illustrate this. This is what happened in 2008 (see presentation slide 5). This is a graph of the cumulative delegate counts. These primaries and caucuses are set up so that the candidates who are successful, by virtue of getting the most votes or a higher percentage of votes, will obtain the most delegates. The key thing to note here is that in 2008 the number of delegates needed to win the nomination was 2,210.

In the Democratic Party there is a difference between what are known as the pledged delegates and unpledged delegates. The result of the McGovern-Fraser reforms and further reforms was that the voters would select delegates that were committed. A certain number of unpledged/superdelegates would give the party some control over the outcome. This would prevent some outlying candidate from being nominated. Ironically, it was designed to prevent a Jimmy Carter—someone from the outside coming in. This has become very controversial in the sense that it is giving the Party control, which violates the spirit of having a more democratic process by which the voters would be able to decide.

The idea of momentum is that at some point, one candidate pulls ahead and gets the nomination. That is really what happens here in 2008. But the thing to notice here is that it is pretty close. What really mattered here was the way in which superdelegates would vote toward the end of the process. Obama did not have enough superdelegates, but he was certainly ahead enough that he could justify arguing that the superdelegates should vote for him. That is in fact what they did. Then of course, you have Iowa and New Hampshire. There are not a lot of delegates picked up there. There is Nevada and South Carolina. Then there is Super Tuesday where a lot of delegates are shown. That is when a candidate is able to pull ahead.

Up until now, there has been a regularity. Once a candidate pulls ahead and gains momentum, he then goes on to win the nomination. Iowa and New Hampshire are very important. However, these states are completely unrepresentative of the United States. They are about 90 percent white. You could look at some of the other statistics as well. The argument is that you give the candidates a chance to compete in an environment where they get a lot of attention. The voters are focused on them in those states and the nation is focused on them. That enables voters to learn about the candidates and decide further in the later elections.

Iowa and New Hampshire’s importance began in 1976. Since 1976, with one exception, no candidate has gone on to get the nomination without winning Iowa or New Hampshire. That one individual who did not win those states, but won a bit later in South Carolina in particular, was Bill Clinton. The one footnote here is that Iowa was a lock for Tom Harkins, who was from that state and so it was really a question of winning New Hampshire or not. That is pretty decisive. So, when candidates say that they are going to pass on Iowa and New Hampshire, they have a screw loose. Case in point, Rudy Guiliani was a front-runner in the Republican primary in one

of the elections. He decided to sit out Iowa and New Hampshire and was never heard from again. Well, except now he is back.

Now 2016 was pretty controversial (see presentation slide 6). Hillary Clinton pulls ahead of Bernie Sanders. She wins Iowa. Sanders wins New Hampshire. She wins South Carolina, which becomes critical. She gathers momentum, but there is a controversial aspect of this that led to further reform. The election was rigged according to Sanders' supporters, and according to our current president who is reflecting on the Democratic Party back then as he considers his prospects in the upcoming presidential election. The Sanders supporters were upset that the Democratic Party was pretty much behind Clinton. She had a bit of a lock on the superdelegates, which was democratically unfair. This resulted in all sorts of repercussions concerning the extent to which Sanders and his supporters supported Hillary during the general election.

It led to a further reform to make the Democratic Party process more democratic. The way the Democrats in recent primaries and caucuses have selected their delegates through voting is through proportional allocation of delegates—proportional to the vote once a minimum threshold is exceeded. The current threshold, that I will come back to, is 15 percent. Notice that Sanders and Clinton ran pretty close. At the end, Clinton pulled ahead, but the situation could have been such that if the superdelegates were actually up for grabs, it could have been a real contest at the Convention. As a result of this, the current rules state that all of the voting is proportional, there is a 15 percent threshold, and the superdelegates do not get to vote until the second ballot. There is good news and bad news. For those supporters of democracy, that is good news. For those supporters of the need for the party controlling things, that is maybe less good news.

You also have to keep in mind that when the second ballot occurs, the committed delegates are only committed for the first ballot. The superdelegates can only turn an election if the delegates who were committed on the first ballot stick to their man or woman on the second ballot, and then the superdelegates could perhaps be decisive if it is a two-candidate race. On the second ballot, the committed delegates are fully free and the rules say they can vote for whichever of the current candidates they like, or they could vote for someone who did not run in the primaries and caucuses. Think about that. The name of the game here is unintended consequences.

On the Republican side in 2008, the momentum thing plays out in full force (see presentation slide 7). But it also plays out in full force because the Republican rules are such that there are a great many more winner-take-all states. They are not proportional. That is, if a Republican wins with 30 percent of the vote he is going to pick up a lot more delegates. In 2008, John McCain was certainly advantaged pretty early by this. In 2012, Mitt Romney picked up and took off in a big way (see presentation slide 8). Then, in 2016, Trump took a little bit longer (see presentation slide 9). But once he got ahead, it was a two-candidate race between him and Ted Cruz. He sailed on to victory, benefitting pretty heavily from winner-take-all primaries.

Another theme of this talk is that the rules matter. It affects how things are counted. Some quick footnotes here (see presentation slide 10). In the primaries and caucuses, some states only allow registered Democrats or Republicans to participate. Other states allow Independents. And other states allow anybody to participate in anything. That is one thing to keep in mind. Another, Republicans have more winner-take-all states.

This 15 percent rule for the Democrats in 2020 is a pretty tricky and consequential number. Each of the candidates who gets 15 percent or more will split the delegates for the state. All kinds of funny hypotheticals are possible here. If one candidate wins with 20 percent and no

other candidate exceeds 15, what proportion of the delegates does that candidate get? 100 percent. There are some perverse aspects to this. Then, if you look at the current polls, you actually see numbers that are not quite that extreme, but you have four candidates splitting things up.

This map shows which voters are allowed to participate in Democratic primaries (see presentation slide 11). In some states only party members can participate (the darker states on the map). In other states, party members and Independents. And in other states all can participate. On the Republican side, it gets more complicated (see presentation slide 12). Some primaries are open to Independents and others are not. Then some states have different combinations of winner-take-all statewide, winner-take-all by congressional district, winner-take-most (which gets complicated), mixed systems, and proportional systems. Those are the additional complications there.

This is the “eyes glaze over” table about how the Democratic Party determines the number of delegates each state gets (see presentation slides 13–15). To make a long story short, it is a function of how well Democratic candidates in the state have done in the past. States where Democrats have done well get more delegates than states in which they have gotten fewer votes. We are going to make these slides available to you, so if you want to get into the weeds of the arithmetic that goes on here, you can.

The additional funny stuff has to do with things like 15 percent of the base delegate votes being added to the number of votes allocated to represent pledged Party and Elected Official delegates. States that have a lot of party leaders and elected officials get extra delegates. The 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. We are really getting into the weeds here, but it shows how complicated this all is.

Now this is where we want to be—2020 (see presentation slides 16–17). We have the number of delegates in each state listed by date. The important takeaways are Iowa on 3 February. New Hampshire on 11 February. Nevada on 22 February—a much more diverse state that is about 40 percent non-white. With Nevada we get a little bit more diverse and inclusive. In South Carolina, on 29 February, African Americans make up a majority of Democratic voters, so that is very important. That is going to be a critical state for Biden who is way ahead in the polls there right now.

The key date is 3 March. That is the big Super Tuesday, which includes California and Texas. If Kamala Harris and Beto O’Rourke do not do well in their home states, they are history. Elizabeth Warren in Massachusetts as well. That is a very big day. After that day, you might expect the field of candidates to dwindle a little bit. It also turns out that the Party wanted to provide incentives for states to have their primaries and caucuses later. States that designate later dates get extra delegates for doing that. That also adds to the arithmetic. It gets complicated—maybe too complicated. Therefore, we can maybe talk more about those dynamics later on.

The Democratic Convention is in Milwaukee on 13–16 July 2020. The Republican Convention is in Charlotte on 24–27 of August. The name of the game here is just to get delegates. In the past, things have played out perfectly with regard to momentum. A candidate picks up momentum, at best or worst, it is a two-candidate race, and that is the end of the story, which you saw in the graphs. In the current election, it is pretty interesting. In this stage of the primary and caucus campaigns, it is not unusual to have a lot of candidates getting support in the polls.

The current national polls have Biden and Warren pretty close. Warren has picked up a little steam and Sanders has fallen off a little bit. If you look at the moment at the RealClearPolitics averages in Iowa and New Hampshire, Warren is a little bit ahead. The candidate who is in play in Iowa is Pete Buttigieg. One of the latest polls actually has him second to Warren, and Biden has fallen off a bit. South Carolina is going to be critical for Biden because he is running close in the other states.

In terms of this not being decided on the first ballot with the 15 percent rule: If three candidates can stay in the race, such that any two candidates has a majority of the vote so to speak, that will prevent any one candidate from getting a nomination on the first ballot. That is something to keep in mind. If it turns into a two-candidate race, then all the momentum rules apply. It could be close at the end, but if it is close, the superdelegates will have no say.

Obviously, this is a very fluid situation. There are more debates coming up, and things will get hot as Iowa and New Hampshire draw near. There are six debates scheduled between January and April. At that point, it is likely that there will be a lot of candidates involved in the debates. One thing that has really changed the dynamic of this is the sheer number of presidential candidates. This is not an accident. You might ask why there have been so many candidates. Political scientists have an answer to this that is not controversial.

One, the candidates are rational people. They run if they think they have a chance to win the presidency. In 2016, many Republicans thought that if they ran they could beat the Democrats because historically a party that has been in the White House for two terms is at a disadvantage. It was a good year for the Republicans in 2016. By the same token, normally running against an incumbent is not a good thing, but right now you have an incumbent whose popularity rating is not high and whose party took an enormous beating in 2018. The 2016 election was close. The Democrats won the popular vote but lost the Electoral College by 56,000 votes in Pennsylvania, 11,000 in Michigan, and about 15,000 in Wisconsin. Thus, this was perceived as a good year, so we have all of these candidates. With all of these candidates, it is really just a matter of whether more than two will be in it at the Convention.

Now, onto the Electoral College. More arithmetic but a little bit simpler in some respects. What you have to know about the Electoral College, is why the Electoral College exists. The history goes back to the Founders. They were distrustful of the masses. They wanted a democratic republic, and they were satisfied with a democratic republic in which voters elected the House of Representatives, and in the states, they elected state legislators and governors. That made for a sufficiently democratic system for them. This is American history 101—the number of electoral votes each state has is equal to its number of senators and House members. Washington, DC has three Electoral College votes pretending it is a state with two senators and one representative. The original rules were such that the states would determine how the electors were selected. Some states allowed for their election. Other states allowed the parties to pick electors, and so forth.

It was thought that the Electoral College would be a group of people who got together and debated who to vote for and would then each cast two votes. The winner and the runner up would be President and Vice President. That was changed quickly to separate votes for President and Vice President. The expectation among the Founders was that there would be no Electoral College winner. The fallback was to have each state delegation in Congress have one vote to pick the President and Vice President. It was expected that Congress would pick the President and the Senate would pick the Vice President. That is how it was set up. The original intent was for the Electoral College to be a deliberative body or just fallback to the House. Which was a good

outcome. The members of the House were democratically elected, so there is something to be said for that I guess.

Now how has this played out? 1992 was a surprisingly good year for the Democrats as it was expected that they would not win the presidency (see presentation slide 23). Several months prior in 1990 or 1991, there was a time when George H.W. Bush's popularity rating was over 90 percent as a result of the Gulf War. But, the economy turned bad. Things did not go well and Bill Clinton, opportunistically, was smart enough to run for President. A lot of good candidates decided not to run because they thought Bush was unbeatable. Clinton took it on, and he really won big time in the Electoral College. His margin in the Electoral College was much greater proportionally than his margin in the popular vote. You have to remember, he received less than 50 percent. Ross Perot ran that year and got 19 percent of the vote. Therefore, Clinton was not a majoritarian popular vote elected President. The Electoral College benefitted him enormously here. And part of the history in terms of which party benefitted from the Electoral vote—the Democrats benefitted more on average than the Republicans did.

1992 is the last time the Democratic Party did extraordinarily well in the South. Clinton won Louisiana, Arkansas, his home state, Georgia, and Tennessee. This map begins to change pretty quickly. In 1996, not that much (see presentation slide 24). He even did a little bit better. In terms of which states switched votes: Colorado in 1992 went for Clinton. Watch Colorado and Arizona. Colorado switches, Arizona becomes Democratic. It is a little bit of a curiosity there.

Let us go to 2000 (see presentation slide 25). Now this is where the map really changes. I would argue that this should be our frame of reference for understanding American presidential politics. The South now is the "Solid South" and in the old days, it was the solid blue South. This was a really close race with a lot of the states picked up by Republicans, and not an extraordinarily large number picked up by the Democrats. However, they got all the big states and all the big votes.

Now, the "blue wall." I was trying to figure out what exactly the blue wall is. Is it the wall on the west coast? Is it the wall on the east coast? Well, it really is Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, right across the top. The blue wall states were solid Democratic. The year 2000 is really interesting. Everybody is focused on Florida. Al Gore wins the popular vote. But, the gap here is pretty small. Everybody was complaining that Gore did not win his home state of Tennessee. Well, he could have won the election had he picked up New Hampshire, or had he picked up Nevada. These were states that had been in play for the Democrats. Another state to watch is Iowa.

2000 is a good frame of reference. This means that Democrats can win the presidency. They do not need Florida, or North Carolina, or Ohio, or Arizona. They just need the blue wall states. Well, things changed a bit because of changes in population. But if they win Nevada and New Hampshire, they basically win the presidency, assuming they maintain the blue wall, which is what fooled everybody.

2004 was pretty similar (see presentation slide 26). A little change there. Democrats lost Arizona and picked up some others. Texas increased its number of Electoral College votes because of the population change, so some of these numbers do change. This really is a game of arithmetic, and the magic number is 270. Next, 2008, big victory for Obama (see presentation slide 27). The blue wall is intact and he picks up North Carolina and Ohio. He did not need them but picked them up. But here is the big change. In 2004, Colorado and Virginia are red. In 2008,

they are blue. 2012, they are blue (see presentation slide 28). In 2012, Obama got Florida but did not need it to win.

Fast forward to 2016 (see presentation slide 29). This is the general election. An overwhelming number of Electoral College votes for Trump. The Democrats lost the blue wall. I spent a big part of the pre-election period giving a dozen or more lectures on the election in South America and even had a conversation with the American ambassador to Argentina, who insisted that it would be a landslide for Hillary and the Democrats. This was one of Obama's political appointees. I said I thought it was just going to be close, but there were too many ways for the Democrats to win the electoral vote. They did not need all of those states. They did not need North Carolina or Florida or Ohio, all of these battleground states.

Some interesting changes here are that Iowa and Ohio have become red states. Iowa now had gone back and forth. It had been more reliably Democratic than not, but now it looks like a red state. Colorado and Virginia, however, look like they are in the Democratic camp for the long term. The same applies to Nevada and New Mexico. The other thing is that Minnesota and New Hampshire were actually very close, within a small number of thousands of votes.

The key thing here going forward into 2020 is that if Democrats again pick up Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, they win the election. However, they need all three. Trump only needs one, assuming everything else stays the same. The arithmetic is pretty simple if you just focus on a small number of key states. This assumes the south is gone for the Democrats and it is in Republican hands.

Obviously, there has been a big outcry about the Electoral College, and that the polls have been misleading. The expectation was that the Democrats were going to win the blue wall states and maybe some others. They won the popular vote and the polls were actually accurate. The polls had Hillary winning by three points or so and she won by two. The Electoral College is said to be anti-democratic in the sense that it is not decided by the popular vote. It is decided by giving some states disproportionate influence. This raised the question of what are the benefits of the Electoral College. Not that the Founders were necessarily thinking about those things. The standard textbook arguments are that if no candidate gets the 270 electoral votes, the presidency is decided by the House and the Senate decides the Vice Presidency.

We will talk about the upsides and downsides of the Electoral College in a minute, but in terms of changing it, it will be one of two ways. One is through a constitutional amendment—there are different ways of amending the Constitution, all of which are difficult and impossible unless you get both parties to agree. The alternative is for state governments to pass what is called the National Popular Vote Bill (see presentation slides 32–33). What the Constitution does not say is that the public voters have a right to vote for the President. It does not even say that the voters have a right to vote for the electors. The electors are determined by whatever way the state legislatures decide. The National Popular Vote Bill states that a state will allocate all of its electoral votes to the candidate that wins the popular vote. The bill becomes enacted and implemented when enough states pass it so that the number of electoral votes is 270. At the moment we are not quite there yet, but a number of states have passed it. We are at the point where we need enough states that would constitute 74 more electoral votes for this to occur. However, do not hold your breath.

There are pros and cons for the Electoral College (see presentation slides 34–37). One pro, and you hear this discussed by all the fans of the Electoral College, is that winning the electoral vote requires a candidate to have broad geographic support. We can debate what that

means. Does it have to be across the country or enough regions? Or what have you. It was originally designed to protect the interests of the small states. The small states with very few voters get at least three, or maybe couple more, electoral votes. They get disproportionate representation in the Electoral College because they each get the two senators, no matter what their population is. It also reinforces the federal structure where states matter. It helps encourage a two-party system.

It is a question mark there. A lot of these explanations cut both ways. Some of these arguments could go on the con side, and some on the con side could be pros. One of the cons is that it could lead to the election of a minority president, which we have had in the case of George W. Bush and Donald Trump. It discourages third-party candidates from running. It potentially depresses voter participation. This is one of the arguments that I am trying to figure out what the mechanism is.

The one argument that I am sympathetic toward, as is my colleague Bob Erikson in Political Science [at Columbia], is that the Electoral College makes counting the vote a little bit easier and makes recounts easier. It makes the running of the elections easier. That is, if you have a close election and you have to do a recount, you do not have to do a national recount; you can just target it toward the key states. The other question is that if we went to a full national popular vote system, wouldn't we need to have uniform national standards for voting with the federal government overseeing the election, not the states? Additionally, in this day in age, one of the downsides of having a unified electoral system is it may be easier to hack, unfortunately. Those kinds of issues come up.

Again, one pro argument is that with this broader geographic representation, it contributes to the country's cohesiveness. Another pro argument is that it enhances the status of minority groups. But, it depends on where the minority groups live and what groups you are defining as minority groups. There are those kind of arguments for the Electoral College.

One of the major arguments against it is there is always this possibility of a "faithless elector". These electors are selected, ostensibly, because they promise to vote for a particular candidate, but it has not been taken up by the courts yet to determine whether the electors really have to adhere to that kind of thing. As of now, the electors are just pledging the vote for the presidential candidate that they are listed for. They could ultimately decide not to. This came up in the context of the last election, where there was some lobbying going on to get electors to change their votes away from Trump.

Anyway, there are bunches of arguments on both sides. Here are the sources that contributed to the slides (see presentation slide 38). I think you have endured the electoral arithmetic enough that we can open the floor for discussion about electoral arithmetic or anything else related to the election.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

The following section reflects answers given by Robert Y. Shapiro in response to audience questions.

Q: Can you give your opinion on what you think the influence of the Latino and Hispanic vote will be in the next election?

A: I think they have become an increasingly important part of the Democratic Party base. In the context of the current geographic mobility of Latinos in the United States—they have been moving around increasingly in cities, and also into suburban areas. They are moving into the Midwest. We are talking about 11,000 votes in Michigan, 56,000 votes in Pennsylvania. I think minority groups, and African Americans in particular in some of the cities, contribute a lot to that. In terms of where they have mattered, I think they have mattered significantly or mattered enough in places like Nevada, New Mexico, and Colorado. They help to keep those states in the Democratic Party camp, so I think they are crucial there.

It is the case that Donald Trump did incrementally better than Romney among black, Latino, and Asian voters. It is a question of where these people lived and how much they mattered in particular locations. Certainly, a big wave is occurring in the electoral landscape in the United States, and demographic change has been moving in favor of the Democrats. That is, white Americans are becoming a smaller proportion of the population and a smaller part of the electorate. Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans are becoming an increasingly larger part of the electorate, in the direction of the Democrats.

It got to a point in 2012, where all of the Republican pollsters and political consultants were urging the Republican Party to do something to attract Latino voters, African American voters, and other minority groups. The competing argument in the Party, or at least among particular candidates, was that the Party did not need to do that. What they needed to do was just to try to appeal to white voters and increase their base of support among whites. That strategy has worked so far, at least in terms of the Electoral College. It obviously is not working with regard to the national vote. It is hard to believe that Trump will win the popular vote in 2020. He has a good chance at winning the electoral vote, but the reason for the Democrats' seeming lock on the popular vote in some respects has to do with these population changes.

Q: Could you possibly discuss, briefly, in light of demographic changes, how this may or may not translate into actual votes on Election Day—depending on turnout and voter suppression?

A: I think turnout is certainly critically important. In the 2016 election, turnout was stable among Latinos, but it was down among African Americans. Thus, turnout is the name of the game. How much has voter suppression contributed to that? It certainly is possible with the legal changes that have occurred since then. I think that is an ever-present danger there. My own view in terms of what happened in 2016, is it really came down to the Democratic base not being as mobilized for Hillary as they were for Obama. Turnout really is the name of the game. We are talking about 90,000 votes in three states.

Q: My question is regarding your take on Democrats who are surging right now versus those who might surge later. I listen to this podcast regularly where they lament about how Obama was doing poorly compared to Clinton in 2008 at this time. Then, because he was not doing as well, he was not getting as many attacks. So he was able to succeed in the end. They think that

is kind of what Mayor Pete [Buttigieg] is doing right now. That he is trying to stay low-key until he can surge later on closer to the elections. What do you think about this?

A: In terms of the strategy of being low-key, there are pluses and minuses. If you are low-key, you are less vulnerable to attacks. If you are low-key, however, you are less likely to get support and less likely to have donors give you money for the election. It is the case once a candidate surges—this is discussed in a book by John Sides and his coauthors, *The Gamble*—the candidate immediately becomes the focus of all the media attention. All the warts and such are exposed in a big way. It happened with Buttigieg earlier on when it came out about how things were going in South Bend. His conflicts with policing and the African American community there were very important.

There is that element of danger. The thing is, it is very fluid and it is early. My observation and hypothesis is that the only thing making this different this time, is that you have some candidates who seem to have a firm enough base of support to make it through no matter what happens in New Hampshire and Iowa. Those are Biden, Sanders, and Warren. For a candidate like Buttigieg really to take off, he does have to do well in Iowa and New Hampshire. Then, all of the other candidates that are in the 5 to 6 percent range, like Kamala Harris, really have to bet the family farm on Iowa and New Hampshire.

Q: Given that websites like FiveThirtyEight incorrectly predicted the outcome in 2016, how are statisticians changing their approach in 2020?

A: The problem was that in doing their modelling and predicting, they were using bad data. That is, the bad data were the data in the state polls. In the cases of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, what went into their predictions was the past voting behavior in those states. There was the expectation that on Election Day, history would repeat itself. In Pennsylvania, I think the final poll averages only had Hillary Clinton ahead by a couple of percentage points, which was off. Wisconsin was off by a lot. They had Hillary ahead by about six points and in Michigan a little bit less.

There were in the post-mortem, after the election, identifiable problems in the state polls. The problems in the state polls were that they did not get the electorate right. They incorrectly estimated the proportion of what are called working class voters or the “less well educated” voters. That is defined as not having a college degree. All of these polls have to be weighted and they were not weighted enough. They also may not have weighted enough for people in rural areas and small towns. What also happened in the end, some voters decided last minute. This might explain why the national polls were not quite on target. The last minute voters went a little more heavily for Trump.

Also, my argument is that the national polls were right. In the last week to two days before the election, there were 11 polls done that were higher quality. Among the states, in the last week before the election, they were basing their estimates on maybe not more than five or six polls conducted in the last week, not two days, the last week. These were not better quality polls. You might ask why there were not better quality and more polls in the states. It is economics. Somebody has to pay for the polls. The media organizations and others doing polling—if they have to do one poll, are they going to poll in Wisconsin or are they going to do a national poll? Especially, given that state and national polls cost the same amount of money to do. Well, they are going to do the national poll because they can get more mileage from it in terms of publicity and so forth. The reason all of these predictors were off was that the basic data they were dealing with was flawed.

What all pollsters are doing now to improve is that they are moving pretty uniformly in the direction of using voter files as the basis for their samples. They are going to be very careful now in terms of their modelling of the election by looking at different scenarios depending on turnout in small towns, rural areas, and among less-educated white voters.

Q: Comparing the way each party handles primaries, I am wondering if one system places [candidates] in a better position toward the national election.

A: I think there is probably a consensus that the Republican nominating system puts them in a better position because of the winner-take-all aspect. It could lead them to get to a candidate earlier. Then, more attention is devoted early on towards fundraising for the national election, rather than raising money towards the remaining primaries.

Q: I am interested in LGBTQ voting data, either nationally or specifically in New York. Obviously, you do not identify as gay when you go to vote, so it is not easily accessible. Do you have any information on that or sources you can suggest looking at?

A: That is a very good question. I have not followed the availability of those kind of data in the pre-election polling. I believe from the last elections, the exit polling data in particular states did collect data on non-binary gender to pick up other categories of gender. The common wisdom is that that vote breaks disproportionately Democratic. I think the data bear that out significantly. Again, the name of the game here is geography. That is, if they vote Democratic in New York or California, it is not a big deal.

Q: Considering your note on the ease of counting votes, do you have a particular distrust towards electronic ballots versus paper ballots?

A: Well, the expert wisdom is that you want a paper backup. If you suspect a problem, you can count the paper votes. I think there is pretty much a consensus on that. Of course, each state has its own separate system. That does not lead to uniformity in complying with that. On the other hand, having a separate system does lead to it being more difficult to hack the entire election.

Q: Is there any measure of fact whether James Comey's big revelation of reopening the investigation into Clinton affected the election?

A: The explanations regarding why Hillary Clinton lost are numerous. The correlational aspects of it, if you look at trends over time of her support, the timing of the Comey stuff, especially the last one, seemed to matter. Now, of course, during that period a lot of other things were allegedly going on, like the Trump Facebook campaign, the Russians doing all kinds of things, and so forth. There was just a lot of stuff going on there. It is a question of which things matter. I think the Comey thing got a lot of press and publicity, and probably reinforced many of the voters' predispositions against Clinton. It may have been decisive for some undecided voters. There is no systematic evidence on that, but there was a blip there.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the impact of the Republicans cancelling primaries in some states?

A: As you can see, in this presentation, I did not pay much attention to the Republican primary, other than pointing out the states' rules regarding open or closed primaries, and whether they are winner-take-all. Historically, it is the case that the party of the incumbent tends to close

things off in terms of their primaries because it is assumed that the presidential candidate has a lock on the nomination. The Republicans this go around have been making a bit more of a concerted effort to control things. We do have a small handful of people running against Trump at the moment. However, the fact that they have closed them off in some states does make it more difficult. Although, they may have to change that if something happens to the President.

Q: Could you elaborate further on the possibility of a second ballot at the Convention?

A: First of all, this is sheer speculation. The truth of the matter is that we do not know what is going to happen. The situation has to be such that no candidate has a majority of committed delegates by the first ballot, in which case everybody votes. They move onto the second ballot. To figure out what might happen, history serves as a guide as to what happened in the old days in the smoke-filled back rooms. There is typically just a lot of negotiating that goes on.

But, the past may not be a guide, because you have so many moving parts here. One factor is how well the leading candidates do, and what kind of claim one of them may think they have over the nomination—by virtue of having a plurality. When the second ballot opens up, there might be jockeying about how the committed delegates think they should vote on the second ballot. This is really just speculation. I have not heard anything else discussed. What I have seen though is some of the candidates trying to woo some of the superdelegates. They have been cognizant that this kind of thing could possibly happen, and they might as well prepare for it in some way.

It could be the case that on the second ballot they see whether everybody votes the same way they did on the first ballot, and see the way the superdelegates vote. If that could change things, let the superdelegates weigh in with everybody else held constant. That requires a certain level of agreement amongst the delegates themselves. It also requires a certain level of agreement among the candidates in terms of the system. The lead candidate will scream bloody murder about why he or she should not be deprived of the nomination.

Q: The premise is that you would have to have more than two candidates. How likely do you think that is?

A: It is predicated on a hypothesis that, assuming everybody stays healthy—we are talking about Biden and Sanders after all—three candidates may have a firm enough base of support that they will be able to pick up delegates throughout. Potentially some of the candidates will do well in some states and not others, so they will each incrementally be picking up delegates along the way, and no candidate will gain that big momentum that would drive things home. This is speculative.

The other thing is that I was at a dinner for a board I was on, and one of my fellow board members asked me a question, in the context of having all of these elderly-type presidential candidates. The Vice President becomes important. The question I was asked was since when does the President get to pick his or her Vice President? It is customary now. It had not occurred in the distant past. The first time it occurred and became a norm was when FDR picked Henry Wallace as his Vice President in 1940, because his existing Vice President was opposing all of his policies. Then, going forward such has been the case. Then the last time the Convention picked the Vice President was in 1956, when Adlai Stevenson decided not to pick. He threw it open to the Convention and it came down between Estes Kefauver and John Kennedy, and Kefauver won. That enabled Kennedy to become the presidential nominee in 1960. I am sure all

of this was part of some kind of deal. It was not just presidents autonomously deciding. Remember, the delegates at the Convention were delegates that were controlled by the Party.

Q: I was interested in two graphics that you put up. One was the 2008 Obama v. Clinton race during the primaries, and the other was the 2016 Clinton v. Sanders race. You see a pretty similar pattern, as you point out, from the surge and the momentum. What do you see for this race? Clearly, without debating all of the issues that defeated Hillary in 2016, Sanders' supporters did not immediately coalesce around Clinton. Meanwhile, in 2008 the supporters of Clinton immediately coalesced around Obama, giving him momentum into the general election. Whereas Hillary does not get that momentum going into the general election, other things happened too. But clearly, that is a critical piece of the puzzle. What do you see in this particular race now in terms of the ability of a candidate in a Democratic primary to either coalesce support, because the demographics as you point out are in favor of the Democrats?

A: First of all, Hillary and Obama were in the same wing of the Party, so to speak. Sanders was more of a populist candidate. However, I think the key thing was when it was revealed that the Party really was behind Hillary and wanted to stop Sanders—that is the superdelegates being locked in. Then, there were all of the shenanigans and things being said within the Democratic Party, in the emails and with Donna Brazile. Once all of that was revealed, people just got really upset. Including, obviously, Sanders himself when he talks about the system being rigged. A noticeable portion of Sanders' supporters went to Trump. In some of the small town areas and so forth in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, these are voters who voted for Obama. They switched over.

In terms of what leads the Party to be coherent and cohesive: The Republicans in 2016 were in control of Congress. I think the Republican Party deeply understood this in 2016 and is why they rallied around Trump. They had a chance to get a unified Republican government and that was really important to them. Well, obviously it was important to them even through 2018, but things turned sour. In this upcoming election, I think any of the Democratic candidates can win the presidency if the Party rallies around them. The rally would either have to occur out of fear of Trump winning again, or a combination of that and the Democrats being able to control all three branches.

What we have not talked about is how the Democratic Party has been decimated in the state houses. They have picked up a little bit in 2018, and it could pick up again. Even if the Republicans lose this election, unless it is really a landslide everywhere, they are still going to be very strong in the states. They could bounce back in a cyclical way here if the Democrats get elected and overstep. We have seen this before.

Q: You focused on both parties, but to win a general election you have to win the entire country. You have to worry about people who are neither Democrats nor Republicans. Is there some way you could talk about the system to reach out to those voters?

A: There is a little of, maybe myth is too strong a word, but there are people out there who are genuinely independent of the parties. There are also people who call themselves Independent. But if you ask them further if they lean toward one party or the other, they tell you they lean towards one party. They actually behave as if they are partisans. There is about 10 percent out there that really are completely independent and they are geographically disbursed. This group, in part, is less likely to vote than other people are. They are even smaller than what their objective number might be. But they are critical and these are the voters that either Party could either

capitalize on or be hurt by if these voters start paying attention, and start swinging uniformly one way. And we are talking about close elections here.

There was a swing in suburbia. There was a bit of a social movement at work. There was the resistance and so forth. It was spearheaded heavily by middle class women out in the Midwest and those states. I have not looked at the data on this, but I am not sure if these people were purely independent and inattentive before they got mobilized, or were regular or semi-regular voters who got mobilized because of what happened in the election. In this close arithmetic game here, those voters can be critical.

Q: How do various potential candidates impact the Senate race?

A: I think what matters there is what happens in particular states. In states in which Trump is vulnerable, if Democrats do well there, there are likely to be some coattails with regard to the Senate. The interesting thing to take note of is that if the impeachment proceeds, there is going to be a lot more attention devoted to the Senate races. That simply drives some of the importance of the Senate and there could be repercussions one way or the other for either party. I think the Senate overall looks pretty close. We are not expecting a landslide here where the Democrats get a filibuster-proof Senate that Obama had for a brief moment in 2008. We are talking about just winning enough seats to have the majority, which would benefit the winning party in terms of executive appointments, like judges.

Q: Do you see a high probability of that?

A: I think that if the Democrats win in a very close election, like they barely pick up Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania—I do not think the Democrats would have enough wind in their sail to get the Senate. On the other hand, if they win by big margins, they could win.

Q: Talking about demographic change, states like Florida, which recently received hundreds of thousands of American citizens that left Puerto Rico, is that going to have an impact on a state like that? Or Texas, which is now becoming radically more Latino?

A: It could. Florida was actually close enough where that could make a difference. What can also make a difference, and it has been controversial, is the felons, who have technically been re-enfranchised if they do not have to pay a poll tax. They have to pay back for court costs and other things.

Q: We are talking about a half million votes that have moved from Puerto Rico into the Orlando area.

A: Those voters could make a difference. Here, the name of the game is registering them. If they have come from Puerto Rico, they have to register here. Registration is easy; getting people out to vote is hard. But, yes, those numbers could make a big difference. Texas is harder, because the vote margin there was bigger. There are places like Arizona that that could be in play. Then, there is also what is happening in the House of Representatives. There are many opportunities now for the Democrats.

Q: I think one of the mistakes that has been made here in the north is that certain demographic populations are naturally going to be Democratic voters. Some of them have turned out not to be because they are looking towards a more traditional or conservative life.

A: That is what the Republican consultants were trying to tell the Party and its leaders in 2012. There were opportunities among Latinos and Asian Americans—African Americans break very heavily towards the Democrats, about 90 percent. Latinos we are talking about roughly 70 percent, and the same goes for Asian Americans. I am lumping South Asia and East Asia together.

Actually, Trump incrementally picked up among those groups, and did better than Romney did. There are definitely opportunities there. They tend to be more conservative on social values, cultural type issues, and religious issues. There are opportunities there. At this moment, the Republican Party is the white identity party. However, that could change. If they take a beating in the upcoming election, the Party will have an opportunity to transform itself.

FUCHS: I think on that note, we should say thank you for a wonderful presentation. Please feel free to continue these conversations, and thank you for coming.