

ABSTRACT

The Electoral College (EC) has occasioned controversy at several points in its history, most recently in 2000 when George W. Bush was elected without winning the popular vote. One principal historical and contemporary argument in favor of the EC is that it performs a balancing function to lift the power of rural and less populous states. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and the measure of voter power as formulated by Banzhaf (1968), this study puts this argument to an empirical test. It finds that the EC has not functioned to balance the electoral power of voters in urban and populous states with those in rural and less populous states throughout the 20th Century and into the 21st Century.

Counterintuitively, by late in the 20th Century it actually enhances the electoral power of the largest and most heavily urbanized states. One partial exception to this finding is that the EC did significantly enhance the power of voters in the South in the decades before the Great Migration took place and civil rights legislation ensured equal voting rights. Analyses in this study uncover the voting rules within the EC that are behind these variations in voter power. The analyses and findings in this study leave a foundation for further study at the county scale that may aid in validating the results here.