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Electoral College Confusion

By Steve Bakke  November 8, 2020



A letter in the Minneapolis StarTribune on 11-4 extolled the purpose and the success of our Electoral College system (“Its genius is in balancing power”). The writer’s leading argument recognized that today, one party has total political control of a handful of high population states that could collectively determine the outcome of a presidential election if based on popular vote totals. Providing balance among very diverse states is one reason our Founders conceived of the Electoral College.

A letter on 11-6 (“Its goals are laudable. Its means of achieving them, not so much.”) disagreed, arguing that balance for the 2016 election wasn’t promoted by the Electoral College process. He declared that Clinton had broad geographic support outside of “the coasts.” But did she?

Look at the numbers. Removing only California from the results left Trump with a popular vote advantage of almost 1.5 million votes. And removing just nine “population center” states leaves Trump with almost a 7 million vote victory – over 20% of votes cast in those remaining 41 states. That massive margin disproves the “broad geographic support” claim.

The Electoral College goal of leveling the influence of areas with high population concentration is being achieved. It’s a worthy goal because the needs of large, lower population areas, often referred to as “flyover” country,” must not be ignored. They contain the bulk of our natural resources and produce much of our food. A voter in Queens, NY can’t be expected to give rapt attention to the needs of a dairy farmer in Iowa.