



May 26, 2020

California Would Not Dominate a National Popular Vote

SUMMARY:

- There is a Republican-leaning area in the south-central part of the country that has the same population as California and that gave Trump essentially the same percentage of its vote (and the same popular-vote margin) as California gave Clinton in 2016.
- There is no more reason to worry about California monopolizing the attention of presidential candidates or dominating the nationwide outcome than to worry about the equivalent Republican-leaning area.
- It is a fact that California has about 37 million people and that it gave Hillary Clinton 62% of its vote and a popular-vote margin of 4.3 million votes in 2016. It is also a fact that California is counter-balanced by an equally populous Republican area in the south-central part of the country (which Nate Cohn called "Appalachaformia") with 37 million people that gave Trump essentially the same percentage of its vote (61%) and essentially the same popular-vote margin (4.5 million).
- The misplaced concern about California dominating a national popular vote arises from an exaggerated view of how many people live in California, how many people vote in California, and how heavily Democratic California is. One out of eight U.S. voters live in California, but four out of 10 of them vote Republican. Meanwhile, one out of eight U.S. voters live in Appalachaformia, and four out of 10 of them vote Democratic. Clinton received 8.8 million votes in California, and Trump received 9.8 million votes from Appalachaformia. To put these numbers in perspective, note that over 137 million votes were cast in the 2016 presidential election.
- The political talking point that focuses on the seemingly large role of California in presidential elections arises from the historical accident that it occupies most of the Pacific Coast, whereas there are 14 states along the Atlantic Coast. California was admitted to the Union as a single state under the Compromise of 1850 because of the then-delicate balance between slave states and free states in the U.S. Senate. If California had been admitted as six separate states (as was suggested at the time), California's population today would be no more noteworthy than that of such Atlantic coast states as Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina (which, by the way, have a greater population than California).
- Political talking points about alternative universes in which certain voters are removed undermine political discourse. Every loser in every election would have won if some carefully selected portion of the other candidate's voters were excluded from the vote count.

DETAILED DISCUSSION:

It is a fact that California has 37 million people, gave Hillary Clinton 62% of its vote in 2016, and gave Clinton a popular-vote margin of 4.3 million votes.

Some defenders of the current state-by-state winner-take-all method of awarding electoral votes have used this fact to argue that California would, under National Popular Vote, monopolize the attention of presidential candidates and dominate the choice of President.

“Conservative analyst Michael Barone [said] the Electoral College serves as a necessary bulwark against big states, preventing California in particular from imposing ‘something like **colonial rule over the rest of the nation.**’”¹
[Emphasis added]

However, Barone’s “colonial rule” assertion overlooks the fact that both political parties enjoy equivalent strong bases of support in different parts of the country.

There is a Republican-leaning area in the south-central part of the country with the same population as California that gave Trump essentially the same percentage of its vote and same popular-vote margin as California gave Clinton in 2016.

As political analyst Nate Cohn observed, there is an equally populous Republican-leaning area with 37 million people that gave Donald Trump 61% of its support and a popular-vote margin of about 4.5 million votes. Cohn gave the name “Appalachaformia” to this group of Republican states running from West Virginia to Wyoming.²

Table 1 shows that the Republican-leaning states of Appalachaformia had a population of 37,961,426, gave Trump 61% of their vote, and gave Trump a popular-vote margin of 4,475,297 votes in 2016.

Table 1 Appalachaformia gave Trump a margin of 4,475,297 votes in 2016³

State	Population	Clinton	Trump	Clinton %	Trump %	Trump Margin
Alabama	4,802,982	729,547	1,318,255	34%	62%	588,708
Arkansas	2,926,229	380,494	684,872	34%	61%	304,378
Idaho	1,573,499	189,765	409,055	27%	59%	219,290
Kansas	2,863,813	427,005	671,018	36%	57%	244,013
Kentucky	4,350,606	628,854	1,202,971	33%	63%	574,117
Louisiana	4,553,962	780,154	1,178,638	38%	58%	398,484
Montana	994,416	177,709	279,240	36%	56%	101,531
Nebraska	1,831,825	284,494	495,961	34%	59%	211,467
North Dakota	675,905	93,758	216,794	27%	63%	123,036
Oklahoma	3,764,882	420,375	949,136	29%	65%	528,761
South Dakota	819,761	117,442	227,701	32%	62%	110,259
Tennessee	6,375,431	870,695	1,522,925	35%	61%	652,230
West Virginia	1,859,815	188,794	489,371	26%	69%	300,577
Wyoming	568,300	55,973	174,419	22%	68%	118,446
Total	37,961,426	5,345,059	9,820,356	33%	61%	4,475,297

Appalachaformia has 12.25% of the U.S. population of 309,785,186 (according to the 2010 census).

Meanwhile, California has 12.05% of the U.S. population.

Table 2 shows California had a population of 37,341,989, gave Clinton 61% of its vote, and gave Clinton a margin of 4,269,978 votes.

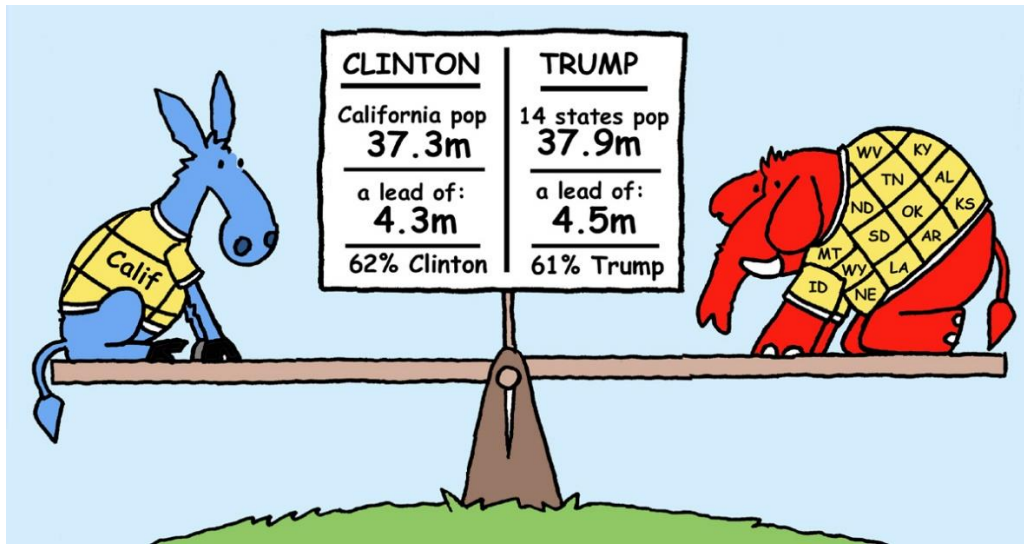
¹ Cohn, Nate. Why Trump Had an Edge in the Electoral College. *New York Times*. December 19, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/19/upshot/why-trump-had-an-edge-in-the-electoral-college.html>

² Cohn, Nate. Why Trump Had an Edge in the Electoral College. *New York Times*. December 19, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/19/upshot/why-trump-had-an-edge-in-the-electoral-college.html>

³ For this table and similar tables in this section, the percentages in columns 5 and 6 are of the total vote (including all third-party candidates). Population figures are from the 2010 census.

Table 2 California gave Clinton a margin of 4,269,978 votes in 2016

State	Population	Clinton	Trump	Clinton %	Trump %	Clinton Margin
California	37,341,989	8,753,788	4,483,810	62%	32%	4,269,978



In summary, the facts concerning California and the Republican-leaning Appalachafornia in 2016 are as follows:

- Both areas gave their favored candidate almost identical percentages of their popular vote (62% and 61%, respectively).
- Both areas gave their favored candidate almost identical margins (4.3 and 4.5 million votes, respectively).
- Both areas had almost identical populations (37.3 and 37.9 million, respectively).

There is no more reason to worry about California dominating a nationwide vote than to worry about the Republican-leaning Appalachafornia area.

California does not assert “colonial rule” over the rest of the United States any more than the equivalent Republican-leaning area does.

Under National Popular Vote, votes from California and the equivalent Republican area would be added together along with votes from the remaining states to produce a nationwide popular vote total for each candidate. In the calculation of the national popular vote, the votes from California and the equivalent Republican-leaning area would balance each other out.

The misplaced concern about California “colonization” arises from an exaggerated view of how many people live in California, how many people vote in California, and how heavily Democratic California is.

The facts are that one out of eight U.S. voters live in California, but four out of 10 of them vote Republican. Out of the 137,125,484 votes cast nationwide for President in 2016, there were 8,753,788 votes for Clinton in California—hardly the “colonial rule” that Barone mentions.

Conversely, one out of eight U.S. voters live in Appalachafornia, but four out of 10 of them vote Democratic. Out of the 137,125,484 votes cast nationwide for President in 2016, Trump received 9,820,356 votes from Appalachafornia.

To put it another way, there were 118,551,340 votes cast in places other than California and Appalachafornia in 2016.

Tellingly, the “colonial rule” that Barone bemoans *is actually occurring today*, because both California and the equivalent Republican-leaning area support their favored candidates at about the 60% level. Because they are not closely divided battleground states, they are routinely ignored

by presidential candidates under the current state-by-state winner-take-all method of awarding electoral votes. The decision as to who becomes President is not made by California or the equivalent Republican area, but instead, by the dozen or so closely divided battleground states. If any states are exercising “colonial rule over the rest of the nation,” it is the dozen or so battleground states that actually pick the President.

California and Appalachafornia were equally balanced in 2012

Barone’s “colonial rule” argument was equally invalid in 2012.

Table 3 shows that the Republican states of Appalachafornia gave Romney 61% of their vote and a margin of 3,520,970 votes in 2012.

Table 3 Appalachafornia gave Romney a margin of 3,520,970 votes in 2012

State	Population	Obama	Romney	Obama %	Romney %	Romney Margin
Alabama	4,802,982	795,696	1,255,925	38%	61%	460,229
Arkansas	2,926,229	394,409	647,744	37%	61%	253,335
Idaho	1,573,499	212,787	420,911	33%	65%	208,124
Kansas	2,863,813	439,908	689,809	38%	60%	249,901
Kentucky	4,350,606	679,370	1,087,190	38%	60%	407,820
Louisiana	4,553,962	809,141	1,152,262	41%	58%	343,121
Montana	994,416	201,839	267,928	42%	55%	66,089
Nebraska	1,831,825	302,081	475,064	38%	60%	172,983
North Dakota	675,905	124,827	188,163	39%	58%	63,336
Oklahoma	3,764,882	443,547	891,325	33%	67%	447,778
South Dakota	819,761	145,039	210,610	40%	58%	65,571
Tennessee	6,375,431	960,709	1,462,330	39%	59%	501,621
West Virginia	1,859,815	238,269	417,655	36%	62%	179,386
Wyoming	568,300	69,286	170,962	28%	69%	101,676
Total	37,961,426	5,816,908	9,337,878	38%	61%	3,520,970

Table 4 shows California gave Obama 61% of its vote and a margin of 4,269,978 votes in 2012.

Table 4 California gave Obama margin of 3,014,327 votes in 2012

State	Population	Obama	Romney	Obama %	Romney %	Obama Margin
California	37,341,989	7,854,285	4,839,958	60%	37%	3,014,327

In summary, the facts concerning California and Appalachafornia in 2012 are:

- Both gave their favored candidate almost identical percentages (61% and 60%, respectively) of their popular vote.
- Both gave their favored candidate somewhat similar margins (3.5 million for Appalachafornia and 3.0 million votes for California).
- Both areas had almost identical populations (37.3 and 37.9 million, respectively).

California and New York together are also equally balanced with a slightly expanded Republican area

In a similar vein, Michael Gomez, another defender of the current state-by-state winner-take-all method of awarding electoral votes, has extended the California “colonization” argument to include New York.

“Of Hillary Clinton’s reported 65,844,954 votes in the 2016 presidential election, 8,753,788 came from California. If California is subtracted from the equation, **Donald Trump wins the national popular vote in the remaining 49 states** by 1,404,903 votes. And if New York is also subtracted, Trump’s margin increases to 3,137,876. So, **the notion that the NPVIC would make ‘every**

vote count’..., as its advocates affirm, **is disproven** when looking at the aforementioned raw number results.”⁴ [Emphasis added]

Gomez doesn’t explain how the fact that the National Popular Vote would make every vote count is “disproven” by his numbers. However, the facts concerning the combined voting power of California and New York are below.

If Nate Cohn’s Appalachafornia is expanded to include four additional Republican states (Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and South Carolina), the resulting “expanded Appalachafornia” has about the same population (58,098,701) as California and New York together (56,763,044 people). This “expanded Appalachafornia” gave Trump 60% of its vote and a margin of 6,038,499 votes. This compares to California and New York together giving Clinton 61% of its vote and a margin of 6,006,563 votes.

Table 5 shows that “expanded Appalachafornia” had a population of 58,098,701, gave Trump 60% of its vote, and gave Trump a margin of 6,038,499 votes in 2016.

Table 5 Expanded Appalachafornia gave Trump a margin of 6,038,499 votes in 2016

State	Population	Clinton	Trump	Clinton %	Trump %	Trump Margin
Alabama	4,802,982	729,547	1,318,255	34%	62%	588,708
Arkansas	2,926,229	380,494	684,872	34%	61%	304,378
Idaho	1,573,499	189,765	409,055	27%	59%	219,290
Indiana	6,501,582	1,033,126	1,557,286	37%	60%	524,160
Kansas	2,863,813	427,005	671,018	36%	57%	244,013
Kentucky	4,350,606	628,854	1,202,971	33%	63%	574,117
Louisiana	4,553,962	780,154	1,178,638	38%	58%	398,484
Mississippi	2,978,240	485,131	700,714	40%	59%	215,583
Missouri	6,011,478	1,071,068	1,594,511	38%	60%	523,443
Montana	994,416	177,709	279,240	36%	56%	101,531
Nebraska	1,831,825	284,494	495,961	34%	59%	211,467
North Dakota	675,905	93,758	216,794	27%	63%	123,036
Oklahoma	3,764,882	420,375	949,136	29%	65%	528,761
South Carolina	4,645,975	855,373	1,155,389	41%	57%	300,016
South Dakota	819,761	117,442	227,701	32%	62%	110,259
Tennessee	6,375,431	870,695	1,522,925	35%	61%	652,230
West Virginia	1,859,815	188,794	489,371	26%	69%	300,577
Wyoming	568,300	55,973	174,419	22%	68%	118,446
Total	58,098,701	8,789,757	14,828,256	36%	60%	6,038,499

The expanded Appalachafornia area has 18.7% of the U.S. population. California and New York together have 18.3% of the U.S. population.

Table 6 shows California and New York had a population of 56,763,044, gave Clinton 61% of their votes and gave Clinton a margin of 6,006,563 votes.

Table 6 California gave Clinton a margin of 4,269,978 votes in 2016

State	Population	Clinton	Trump	Clinton %	Trump %	Clinton Margin
California	37,341,989	8,753,788	4,483,810	62%	32%	4,269,978
New York	19,421,055	4,556,142	2,819,557	59%	37%	1,736,585
Total	56,763,044	13,309,930	7,303,367	61%	33%	6,006,563

In summary, the facts in 2016 concerning California and New York in comparison to the “expanded Appalachafornia” are:

- Both areas gave their favored candidate almost identical percentages of their popular vote (61% and 60%, respectively).
- Both areas gave their favored candidate almost identical margins (6,038,499 and 6,006,563 votes, respectively).
- Both areas had almost identical populations (56.7 and 58.0 million, respectively).

⁴ Gomez, Christian. National Popular Vote Compact Threatens Republic. *The New American*. February 1, 2017. <http://www.thenewamerican.com/usnews/constitution/item/25202-national-popular-vote-compact-threatens-republic>

Of course, there are numerous other combinations of Republican states different from Nate Cohn's Appalachaformia that could be assembled to counterbalance California's vote (and to counterbalance the combined votes of California and New York). The reality is that the presidential votes in the United States are divided approximately equally between the parties. In the seven elections between 1992 and 2016, the average margin in the national popular vote for President has been 4.4%.

Historical accident that put most of the Pacific Coast in one state

The political talking point that focuses on the role of California in presidential elections stems from the historical accident that it occupies most of the Pacific Coast, whereas there are 14 states along the Atlantic Coast.

California was admitted to the Union as a single state under the Compromise of 1850 because of the then-delicate balance between slave states and free states in the U.S. Senate. If California had been admitted as six separate states (as was suggested at the time), California's population today would be no more noteworthy than that of such Atlantic coast states as Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina (which, by the way, have a greater population than California).

The question of statehood for California arose immediately after the huge population growth caused by the 1849 Gold Rush. There was talk of creating six new states when the California statehood convention convened in Monterey in September 1849.⁵ However, one of the Monterey convention's first acts was the unanimous adoption of a prohibition against slavery.

The political reality in Washington was that the creation of *even one* new free state threatened to upset the then-existing delicate balance between the 15 then-existing slave states and 15 free states in the U.S. Senate. This problem had been side-stepped for several decades by carefully balancing the admission of one new slave state with each new free state.⁶ For example, the Missouri Compromise of 1820 involved simultaneously admitting a slave state (Missouri) and a free state (Maine). In fact, was carved out of the existing territory of Massachusetts for the occasion.⁷

In 1850, there was no suitable new slave state available to balance out the admission of *even one* new free state—much less three or six new free states. The resulting political deadlock preoccupied Congress for nine months during 1850 (during which almost no other business was transacted). The eventual "Compromise of 1850" involved admitting the huge area that is now California as a single state (thereby upsetting the balance in the U.S. Senate) while placating the South with the enactment of a harsh federal Fugitive Slave Law and a financial bailout of the slave state of Texas. The Compromise also included settling a boundary dispute in the Southwest and abolishing the slave trade (but not slavery) in the District of Columbia—the only tangible result of which was that the slave markets moved across the Potomac River.

Political talking points about alternative universes in which certain voters are removed undermine political discourse

In an article entitled "If Only You Couldn't Vote," Mark Mellman said:

"A favorite meme in Trump World argues that if it weren't for California, Hillary Clinton would have lost the national popular vote for president, which

⁵ Bordewich, Fergus M. 2012. *America's Great Debate: Henry Clay, Stephen A. Douglas, and the Compromise that Preserved the Union*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. Page 50.

⁶ ⁶ Bordewich, Fergus M. 2012. *America's Great Debate: Henry Clay, Stephen A. Douglas, and the Compromise that Preserved the Union*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. Page 12.

⁷ ⁷ Bordewich, Fergus M. 2012. *America's Great Debate: Henry Clay, Stephen A. Douglas, and the Compromise that Preserved the Union*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. Page 76–79.

she won by almost 3 million ballots. ... Of course, it's also true that **without ... Texas and Alaska, Trump would have lost the Electoral College** along with the popular vote. ... **Such attempts to fashion an alternate universe attack a fundamental tenet of American democracy.** ... Pitting urban against rural, Texas against California, **rips the 'United' out of the United States.**"⁸
[Emphasis added]

This recently minted partisan talking point has seeped into state-level politics as well. After Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker (R) lost his 2018 reelection race, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R) said:

"If you took Madison and Milwaukee out of the state election formula, we would have a clear majority."⁹

However, as Mellman pointed out,

"Without Waukesha, Washington and Ozaukee counties, Scott Walker would not have been elected governor in the first place."¹⁰

Indeed, every loser in every election would have won if some carefully selected portion of the other candidate's voters had been excluded from the vote count.

⁸ Mellman, Mark. 2018. If only you couldn't vote. *The Hill*. December 18, 2018. <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/421996-mellman-if-only-you-couldnt-vote>

⁹ Mellman, Mark. 2018. If only you couldn't vote. *The Hill*. December 18, 2018. <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/421996-mellman-if-only-you-couldnt-vote>

¹⁰ Mellman, Mark. 2018. If only you couldn't vote. *The Hill*. December 18, 2018. <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/421996-mellman-if-only-you-couldnt-vote>