

**Can a party school be sophisticated?
Citizen preferences for Electoral College reform**

Jason Reifler
Georgia State University
jreifler@gsu.edu

John Aldrich
Duke University
aldrich@duke.edu

We are extremely grateful to Peter Feaver and Christopher Gelpi for letting us add questions about Electoral College reform to the end of a survey they conducted with Jason Reifler in October 2004. We are even more grateful to Michael Munger, who along with John Aldrich, actually paid for the questions we added. Ryan Yonk provided research assistance.

Abstract

There is a growing body of evidence showing that at least some citizens sufficiently understand the electoral process to cast strategically “insincere” ballots for candidates they like less, but who are more likely to win an election. Are citizens similarly sophisticated in their preferences over electoral rules? In this paper, we show that citizens are capable of sophisticated preferences about electoral rules. Using polling data from a nationally representative sample conducted right before the 2004 election, we show that support for a reform to split a state’s Electoral College votes proportionally is explained by which candidate one supports, which candidate one thinks is likely to win the election, preferences for abolishing the Electoral College in favor of the popular vote winner, and the interactions between them. More simply, Kerry voters are far more supportive of a plan to split their state’s electoral college votes in accord with the state’s popular vote if they felt George W. Bush was likely to win in that state, and much less supportive when they believed that John Kerry would win, while the reverse is true for Bush voters.

Political science has amassed a large body of evidence demonstrating strategic behavior at both the elite and mass levels. Political elites, e.g., legislators, understand the institutional rules that shape their decision making context and adopt political strategies accordingly. These political elites sufficiently understand such institutional rules as amendment trees to realize that they may have cast an “insincere” vote for a less preferred option to position it farther down the tree against a more preferred outcome that will win in pairwise voting but otherwise would have lost. Elites, in short, use the rules to their advantage to reach more preferred outcomes. Legislators will even seek to change the institutional rules to achieve their political aims (e.g. Binder 1997; Dion, 1997). Binder clearly shows that attempts to change the rules are “sophisticated,” that is support of any particular proposed “reform” comes mainly with a calculus of who will be advantaged and who disadvantaged politically, typically with lesser regard to the long term consequences of the proposal.

This paper examines a similar problem in a context where such calculation is not usually suspected to exist: citizen support for an electoral reform proposal. The proposal is to allocate a state’s Electoral College votes proportionally based on the state popular vote; directly analogous to political elites politicking over rules to gain a short term electoral advantage.

To find that voters might consider the consequence of such a change for their preferred party and its candidates is to show that it is not just political elites who are capable of sophisticated behavior. It has long been known that when confronted with more than two options, citizens may throw their support behind a candidate or party other

than their first ranked preference in order to help keep even less preferred outcomes from winning. They avoid, in the usual parlance, wasting their vote on hopeless candidates, casting it where and for whom it will have more effect. This finding is very robust—politically sophisticated behavior at the mass level is found across countries and electoral rules. In fact, strategic behavior in multi-candidate plurality winner elections is what some regard as a “law” in the sense of a scientific regularity. Duverger’s Law states that there is a “psychological effect” of majority systems such that voters are willing to abandon their first choice candidate for a less preferred candidate who has a better chance of winning overall. As Duverger (1954) points out, this pushes first-past-the-post electoral systems towards two parties (see Cox 1997 for a formalization). Yet even two-party systems can sometimes present competitive multi-candidate elections, such as with American presidential nominating process. In these elections, Abramson et al. (1992) find that voters are strategic in their primary candidate preferences and vote for less preferred candidates. Rickershauser and Aldrich (2007) show that electability is a key consideration in candidate choice. And (despite the pun), electability may be the primary concern.

As Abramson et al., (2004; forthcoming) show, it is not just the relatively clear circumstances that flow from two-party electoral systems that induce strategic behavior among citizens, but it is a common finding in proportional systems with many parties as well. Moreover, there is also evidence that sophisticated reasoning extends beyond the case of avoiding wasting a vote on a hopeless loser. Blais, et al. (2006) find clear evidence that, in an Israeli election, at least some voters also considered the consequences of elections, in the sense that they conditioned their vote, in part, on their preferences

over coalitions likely to form after the election. This suggests a deeper, more sophisticated reasoning than voters are ordinarily assumed to employ.

Merolla (2003), finally, shows that voters appear responsive to elite cues about strategic voting in the 2000 U.S. presidential election was confined primarily to residents of those states in which Gore and Nader ran campaign ads for and against, respectively, strategic voting. Her findings suggest that voters may, in effect, be responsive to instructions from favored or opposed elites. Our investigation will indicate that strategic considerations appear to come into play even in the absence of elite cues.

While Cox (1997) shows that electoral rules play a powerful role in shaping the strategic behavior of citizens, we ask a more direct question—do voters have preferences about the electoral rules themselves, and if so, are these preferences “sophisticated”? If citizens are capable of strategic behavior in the first place, it stands to reason that they can also have sophisticated preferences about electoral rules. In this paper, we present evidence that citizens possess sophisticated preferences about electoral rules. Using polling data from a nationally representative sample conducted right before the 2004 election, we show that support for splitting a state’s Electoral College votes proportionally to the state popular vote is a function of which candidate one supports *and* which candidate one thinks is likely to win the election. That is, Kerry voters were far more supportive of a plan to split their state’s Electoral College votes in accord with the state’s popular vote if they felt George W. Bush was likely to win in that state, and much less supportive when they believed that John Kerry would win, and vice versa for Bush voters. These patterns support the inference that voters act as though they consider the

effects of proposed rules on the outcome of the immediate election and do so in a way that supports their immediate self interest.

Given the current tight divisions in American politics, even small changes in how presidential electors are parceled out may change the outcome of an election. Currently, 48 of the 50 US states use winner-take-all allocation rules for their Electoral College votes; under these rules a state's popular vote plurality winner gets all of the Electoral College votes. Maine and Nebraska, the two states without winner-take-all rules, allocate electors carrying pluralities in congressional districts. In these plans, the two "senate" votes are awarded to the state's popular vote plurality winner, and the remaining electors are given to the popular vote plurality winner in each congressional district.¹ Political elites are aware of the closeness of national elections, and realize that even small changes could change the outcome of national elections.

Since 2004, at least two states, Colorado and California, have entertained unilateral Electoral College reforms.² In 2004, Colorado offered a ballot initiative to voters that gave citizens the opportunity to amend the state constitution to change its Electoral College allocation. Rather than winner-take-all, electors would be awarded proportionally. In practical terms, this would mean that rather than 9 electors being up for grabs in Colorado, swinging on the shifts of one a handful of votes, only 1 elector would have been in play because the Electoral College votes would almost certainly have been split 5-4, and this remains true through at least the 2008 election. Had such a

¹ While it is possible for Maine and Nebraska to split their electors between the candidates, neither has done so in the past 10 presidential elections.

² By unilateral reform, we mean reforms that would only affect that one state. Separately, a number of states have joined (or are entertaining joining) the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. Under this agreement, which takes effect after states that award a total of 270 Electoral College votes join, states would award their electors to the national popular vote winner, regardless of the outcome of the popular vote in their state. There is considerable debate whether such an agreement is Constitutional or enforceable.

reform been in play instituted for the 2000 election, it would have swung the election from George Bush to Al Gore. While it would have been a boon to national Democratic candidates (at least when Republicans are the state's popular vote plurality winner), proportionality would have been harmful to Colorado's overall voting power (Beisbart and Bovens 2008).

As might be expected, the chief proponents of Colorado's Amendment 36 (as the ballot initiative to create a proportional split of electors was known) were Democrats. It is not difficult to see why Democrats would choose to pursue this reform. Including the 2004 election, Colorado has been a "Red State" in 9 out of the 10 previous presidential elections, with 1992 being the exception.³ Given how close many expected the 2004 presidential race to be (coming on the heels of Al Gore winning the popular vote but losing the in the Electoral College), Democrats perhaps saw a switch to proportionality as an easy way to pick up a few Electoral College votes. And as might similarly be expected, Republicans opposed the initiative.⁴

Lest one think that these divergent views on Electoral College reform were natural differences between Republicans and Democrats, a quick look at a similar reform effort in California should make clear that support and opposition are driven by their perceived electoral consequences. In preparation for the 2008 general election, Republicans in California wanted to change how that state allocates electors. Republican political operatives attempted to gather enough signatures for a ballot initiative that

³ But even then Bill Clinton only carried 40.13% of the vote, compared to 35.87% for George H. W. Bush and 23.32% for Ross Perot

⁴ In hindsight, Amendment 36 passing would not have changed the outcome of the 2004 Presidential election. However, had it passed it might affect the outcome of the 2008 Presidential election. We consider it interesting (and/or amusing) that as of this writing it is unclear which party would benefit and which would suffer under proportionality in Colorado.

would have allocated California's Electoral College votes in Congressional District based system, like Maine and Nebraska. Democrats opposed the measure. Ultimately, the signature drive did not gather enough names to out the proposal on the ballot. Here, the Republican chances of winning California in the foreseeable future are slim. The delegation is, however, so large that getting, say, 40% of the vote (in a very bad year for the GOP) is worth a great deal more (an expected 22 of the state's 55 electoral votes) than the 0 electoral votes they anticipate under the current rules.

In both the Colorado and California cases, partisan politicians sought to change the electoral rules in a way that would favor their party in the next election, and perhaps longer. That these elites pursued changes in the rules in states where the new rules would undermine the electoral strength of the candidate presumptively preferred by a majority implies that elites think the public would either not understand the effects of the new rules, or be swayed by ethical claims for greater fairness. Thus assessing public responses to such reforms can yield important new insight into the sophistication of the voting public.

We use data from a nationally representative survey of Americans conducted immediately prior to the 2004 election.⁵ Specifically, we ask respondents how much they would support a reform, similar to that proposed for Colorado's to allocate the Electoral College vote in proportion to the votes cast by the public in their state.⁶ Overall, we expect that support for this state level reform will be a function of their preference for

⁵ Surveys were conducted via the Internet with Knowledge Networks. Knowledge Networks uses a random probability sample to recruit subjects to its panel. Survey results obtained via Knowledge Networks are consistent with those obtained by RDD telephone interviewing. For more information, see the Knowledge Networks website, www.knowledgenetworks.com.

⁶ See the appendix for complete wording; the question text includes a fairly detailed explanation of the reform.

reform of the Electoral College. Beyond this general preference for reform, we further anticipate an interaction between support for a candidate and beliefs about which candidate will win. In particular Kerry [Bush] supporters will be more likely to support the reform when they believe that Bush [Kerry] is likely to win in their state, and will exhibit far less support for proportionality when they believe that Kerry [Bush] will carry the state.

We believe that the analyses presented here may help extend our understanding of the public's sophistication. Most attempts to examine sophisticated voting examine strategic voting, or the deliberate abandonment of one's most preferred option over candidates or parties. In the case of reforms of rules, behavior is not strictly "strategic" in the game theoretic sense, but it is very much what we ordinarily mean by sophisticated. Here, that is modulating any ethical preferences by anticipation of the strategic consequences of rules reform on preferred candidates or parties. Measurement is rather simple, asking 1) which candidate is supported; 2) who the respondent thinks is likely to win in the state, and 3) whether or not they support the reform proposal. Our two hypotheses, then, are, first, that support for reform varies by ethical considerations, something that varies across respondents, and, second, that support will also be a function of both candidate preference and expectations of which candidate will win.

Electoral College reform is a hard test for showing sophisticated preferences because it requires a very high amount of knowledge on the part of citizens. As anyone who has ever taught an introductory American politics course knows, explaining exactly how the Electoral College works is an extremely difficult task. And if test results from our classes are a reasonable measure, getting that explanation to stick is an even more

difficult task. But it is also a hard test for sophistication, because excepting residents of Colorado, respondents must assess such considerations on their own, without benefit from guidance or instruction from political elites via campaigning over the reform proposal.

Colorado's Amendment 36

Our basic expectations about reform preferences are confirmed when we examine the story of Colorado's Amendment 36. Coloradans who identify with the Democratic party were far more likely to support Amendment 36 than either Independents or Republicans. Table 1 shows polling data from Colorado concerning citizen support for Amendment 36. Several things stand out. First, from early October to election day, Republican support drops dramatically. The first Survey USA shows about one out of three Republicans (33%) supporting Amendment 36. On election day, the exit poll shows only 17% of Republicans supporting Amendment 36. During the course of the election, Republican sentiment moves towards the more sophisticated preference of opposing Amendment 36.

Perhaps a bit more surprisingly, support among Democrats also declines slightly for Amendment 36 during the course of the campaign. Initial support among Democrats is 59%, and the exit poll shows Democratic support on election at 56%. However, there is a little more to the pattern—Democratic support follows somewhat of a “U” shape. Supports starts high, declines, and then starts going back up. The declines in Democratic support for Amendment 36 appeared in mid-to-late October—exactly when it seemed that Kerry might carry Colorado—so there is a small chance that the U-shaped pattern of

Democrats changing preferences is in response to information from the electoral environment. That is, Democratic support for proportionality drops as the perceptions that Kerry will win in Colorado increase—support for Amendment 36 then rebounds as the perceptions return to a belief that Bush will win. Alternate explanations are that the changes are too small to be meaningful reliably, or simply that as some prominent Democrats (like then Attorney General and Senate candidate Ken Salazar) took public positions against Amendment 36, Democratic identifiers followed those cues and began to oppose Amendment 36. That is the campaign for the proposal kicked in and voters simply responded in reaction to elite cues. There simply is not good enough data to distinguish among the explanations of Kerry prospects, elite cue arguments, and sampling error for the observed patterns in aggregate data in Colorado.

Support for Proportionality

The patterns of support for Amendment 36 provide *prima facie* evidence that voters have sophisticated preferences when it comes to electoral reform. We use survey data from a nationally representative sample collected just before the 2004 election to provide more systematic evidence of voter sophistication. Our survey allows us to avoid some of the problems associated with only using Colorado data. First, our question lacks any elite party cues that could give away the “correct” answer, so we are examining the sophistication of citizen preferences absent elite cues. While elite cues are no doubt important, excluding such cues give a much cleaner and more direct test of citizen sophistication in their preferences for electoral reform. Second, we deal with the problem of subjective beliefs of which candidate will win by directly asking respondents which

candidate they think is likely to win in their state, rather than relying on significantly blunter measures like recent polls in a given state.⁷ Third, our data are gathered at the individual level, so we do not have to worry about the inference problems that come from using only aggregate data.

A quick look at some simple cross-tabs from the survey data (Table 2) shows that support for proportionality differs for Bush and Kerry voters overall. Kerry voters are generally more supportive of proportionality than are Bush voters. This finding makes intuitive sense—after the 2000 Presidential election Democratic partisans are likely more inclined than Republican partisan to support reforming the Electoral College.

Even with greater support for reform generally among Kerry voters, there are still noticeable differences among like-minded voters in different electoral contexts. Looking at the cross-tabs, we see the expected pattern of Kerry voters in “Red” states more supportive of proportionality than Kerry voters in “Blue” states, and we see precisely the reverse for Bush voters, again as expected. More specifically, 75% of Kerry voters in states that Bush won in 2000 support proportionality. Only 68% of Kerry voters in Gore state support proportionality. As for Bush voters, 51% of those in states that Bush won in 2000 support proportionality, compared to the 64% that support proportionality in Gore states. However, the relationship between support for Electoral College reform and voting in the 2000 election understates the degree to which voters have sophisticated

⁷ Survey responses are, of course, vulnerable to rationalization, and that is often argued to be particularly so with respect to questions about favored or opposed candidates’ chances of victory. It is for this reason, in part, that exogenously given estimates of candidate chances, such as poll standings or after the fact actual vote results, are often employed. Here, however, the connection between favoring reform of the Electoral College and rationalization of one’s preferred candidate’s chances of carrying the local state are sufficiently remote as to make the assumption that we do make, that voters develop preferences for Electoral College reform from, in part, their estimate of their candidate’s chances in their home state rather than the reverse.

preferences. What matters is not which candidate won a state in the previous election, but rather which candidate they think is going to win in the current election.

Given the number of variables that we are now interested in (vote choice, subjective view of who will win, preference for proportionality) and control variables that we may care about, it is far easier to make sense of the data with regression rather than comparing marginals across subgroups. Specifically, we want to estimate a model predicting support for proportionality using vote choice, perceptions of which candidate will win, preference for Electoral College reform generally, and several control variables as independent variables. We further believe that there is an interaction between vote choice and beliefs about which candidate will win. More formally, our model is:

$$\begin{aligned} \textit{Proportionality} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1\textit{StateWinner} + \beta_2\textit{Vote} + \beta_{12}\textit{StateWinner*Vote} + \\ & \beta_3\textit{Amendment} + \beta_4\textit{Education} + \beta_5\textit{Sex} + \beta_6\textit{Age} + \beta_7\textit{Income} + \varepsilon \end{aligned}$$

Where,

- *Proportionality* is support for a state adopting a plan to split its electoral votes in proportion to the state presidential popular vote
- *StateWinner* is a five point scale of which candidate a respondent believes will win the Presidential election in their state, which runs from -2 (“George W. Bush will almost certainly win the popular vote in [your state]”) to 2 (“John Kerry will almost certainly win the popular vote in [your state]”)
- *Vote* is a five point measure of vote choice, which runs -2 (Kerry) to 2 (Bush)
- *Amendment* is a four point scale measuring support for a constitutional amendment to replace the Electoral College with the national popular vote winner
- *Education, Sex, Age, and Income* are standard control variables (complete coding information in appendix)

- *State*Vote* is an interaction term between *State* and *Vote*.

The interaction term *StateWinner*Vote* is the key coefficient for examining whether or not voters have sophisticated preferences about electoral reform. A significant interaction on *StateWinner*Vote* should be interpreted to mean that the effect of *StateWinner* on *Proportionality* is conditional on who one plans to vote for in the presidential election. Kerry voters should be more supportive of proportionality when they believe George W. Bush will win in their state, and less supportive when they believe that John Kerry will win. The reverse is true for Bush supporters.

We estimate the model using ordered probit. Results are presented in Table 3. The first thing that stands out in the results is that the interaction term is significant (Model 1), providing support for the idea that voters have sophisticated preferences about changes to electoral rules—their preference for reform depends on who they think will benefit from reform. In addition to these sophisticated preferences (which we examine more closely in Models 2 & 3), we find that support for the unilateral state reform is also a function of one's preference for Electoral College reform more generally. Using predicted probabilities estimated from Model 1⁸, the change in strongly supporting proportionality goes from 44% (81% strongly or somewhat support) if one strongly supports a Constitutional Amendment to use the popular vote winner to just 7% (31% strongly or somewhat support) if one strongly opposes said amendment. Among the control variables, *Age* and *Education* are significant. Older voters are less supportive of proportionality, while more educated voters are more supportive.

⁸ Predicted probabilities generated using the SPost suite of Stata post-estimation commands (Long and Freese 2006).

In order to understand more clearly the substantive meaning of the significant interaction term *Vote*StateWinner*, we also run separate estimations restricted to Kerry voters and Bush voters (Models 2 & 3 respectively).⁹ As expected, *StateWinner* is significant in both models. And as also expected, the signs are significant in opposite directions. Consistent with the hypothesis of sophisticated preferences, Kerry voters become more enamored of reform as they perceive that Bush will win the Presidential vote in their state, and less supportive of reform when they think that Kerry will win. Bush voters are exactly the opposite—they become less supportive of reform as they perceive that Bush will win the election in their state. Support for an Amendment to institute the national popular vote winner continues to be significant in both restricted models. However, none of the control variables are significant in either of the Kerry Voter or Bush Voters models. Figure 1 presents predicted probabilities from Models 2 & 3 that quite clearly shows this relationship.¹⁰

Among Kerry voters, the predicted probability of supporting proportionality is 83% (51% strongly support) among those who are “almost certain” that George W. Bush will win their state. Among those who believe that John Kerry will “almost certain[ly]” win their state, support for a proportional split of Electoral college votes drops to 59% (25% strongly support). Changing the electoral context from a strong Bush state to a strong Kerry state (holding all else constant—including support for a constitutional amendment to replace the electoral college with the popular vote winner) leads to a

⁹ These models include initially undecided voters who say they “lean” towards supporting one of the candidates. The reported effects are even stronger if we exclude the “leaners.”

¹⁰ This procedure gives us a clear demonstration of the effect of the interaction. Alternative procedures are discussed in Brambor, et al. (2006).

nearly 25 percentage point drop in support for a state unilaterally switching to a proportional allocation of Presidential electors.

We see exactly the opposite relationship among Bush voters. Among Bush voters who believe that Bush will win their state, 55% support a proportional split (only 18% strongly support). Among those who Bush supporters who believe that Kerry will win their state, 78% support proportionality (39% strongly support)—almost a 25 percentage point increase in support. Voters clearly have sophisticated preferences about changes to electoral rules. Voters seem to have a clear understanding of how changing the electoral rules will affect the electoral prospects of their preferred candidate.

Restricting the models by vote choice also allows us to more easily parse how a general preference for eliminating the Electoral College (measured by *Amendment*) affects preferences for a state based reform. Table 4 presents three additional models that include additional interaction terms to examine how this overall preference for abolishing the Electoral College affects the sophisticated preferences we see in the analyses above. We use all the same variables as in Models 1-3, with one small exception. To make interpretation of all the multiple interactions a little easier, we reduce the four point scale for *Amendment* to a dummy variable (0= support Amendment abolishing EC, 1=oppose Amendment abolishing EC). In Model 4 that includes all voters, the three way interaction term almost reaches significance ($p < .1$). Additionally, the two way interaction between *Vote* and *StateWinner* remains significant. Thus, there is suggestive evidence that in addition to the sophisticated preferences stemming from the interaction of *Vote* and *StateWinner*, there may also be an interactive effect based on one's overall preferences for reform of the Electoral College. Models 5 & 6 replicate Model 4, but

only among Kerry and Bush voters, respectively. By restricting the analysis based on vote choice, we remove the three way interaction as well the additional two way interactions involving *Vote*.

Looking only at Kerry voters, there is not a significant interaction between *Amendment* and *StateWinner*. That is, whether or not one supports a Constitutional Amendment to abolish the Electoral College does not affect the degree to which preferences are sophisticated. Those who support an Amendment are little different from who oppose an amendment in how perceptions of which candidate will win the state affect their support for splitting that state's electors in proportion with the state popular vote. Both supporters and "opposers" seem to be equally sophisticated, as can see in the first panel of Figure 2.

As can be seen in the second panel of Figure 2, there is a distinct difference with Bush voters. For Bush voters who support a Constitutional Amendment to replace the Electoral College, the slope of *StateWinner* is not significantly different than zero (although the sign is in the correct direction). That is, sophisticated considerations do not seem to come into play when considering whether or not to support a plan to split a state's Electoral College votes. For Bush voters who oppose a Constitutional Amendment, support for proportionality is much more sensitive to perceptions of electoral climate.

We do not want to go too far out on a limb from these latter analyses. On the one hand, it intuitively makes sense that those who support a Constitutional Amendment to replace the Electoral College would be less sensitive to "stratery" in their support for a state level reform. On the other hand, we cannot say why the *Amendment*StateWinner*

interaction is significant for Republicans, but not Democrats. What we do know is that Kerry voters voice significantly more support for a Constitutional Amendment to abolish the Electoral College than do Bush voters (86% compared to 60%). It is possible that there really is a meaningful difference among Kerry voters who support a Constitutional Amendment and Kerry voters who oppose one, and that we simply do not have a large enough sample to see that difference as significant. The conclusion that we are confident in is that voters have sophisticated preferences when it comes to electoral reform. We believe that our results about citizens exhibiting an understanding of the Electoral College helps confirm other research that show that voters are knowledgeable about complex electoral systems (e.g. Karp 2006).

Conclusion:

Between 1796 and 1800, the first two political parties began seriously organizing to win the 1800 presidential election (see Aldrich, 2005). Both Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans (today's Democrats), concerned about the expected closeness of the election, successfully sought to change virtually every state's rules governing the election of Electors to the Electoral College. Without exception, if a party held control of the state government and expected to win the coming presidential vote in that state (true in nearly all states), they changed the rules. They either went from district to state-wide plurality winner-take-all rules, or they ended popular voting for Electors altogether and chose Electors within the state legislature. And, they were right in each case, that is, they correctly forecast the state electoral outcome and thereby won all of the state's electoral votes for their party's candidate. As it happened the nation was in very close balance,

and while the changes mattered massively within each state, but they exactly balanced each other nationwide.

While it may be no surprise that Hamilton and Madison, Adams and Jefferson understood the consequences of the rules and acted accordingly, we have found that voters are as prescient as the Founders, at least in this specific regard. We have found, that is, that voters are quite sophisticated in the common-language meaning of that term. They have what we have been calling “ethical” preferences for reform of the Electoral College, and that matters to the support they give to the proposed reform. Voters also, however, recognized that they have a self interest in reform, in that the reform would help the candidate who stands to lose the popular vote in the state, and voters were substantially more likely to support reform when it would be in their self interest to do so. This is interesting not only as a demonstration of the sophistication of the electorate in the aggregate, but also in their ability to discern the consequences of the proposed reform and their self interest thereby induced. And, it is especially interesting, because this reform had not been a subject of debate among political elites or of a campaign for or against it, except in Colorado. Thus, the “sophisticated voter” in this case, proved to be truly sophisticated.

References

- Abramson, Paul R., John H. Aldrich, André Blais, Matthew Diamond, Abraham Diskin, Indridi H. Indridason, Daniel Lee, Renan Levine. Forthcoming “Comparing Strategic Voting under FPTP and PR,” Comparative Political Studies.
- Abramson, Paul, John H. Aldrich, Matthew Diamond, Abraham Diskin, Renan Levine, and Thomas J. Scotto. 2004. Strategic abandonment or sincerely second best? The 1999 Israeli Prime Ministerial election. *Journal of Politics* 66: 706-728.
- Abramson, Paul R., John H. Aldrich, Philip Paolino, and David Rhode. 1992. “‘Sophisticated’ Voting in the 1988 Presidential Primaries.” *American Political Science Review* 86(1):55-69.
- Aldrich, John H. 2005. “The Election of 1800: The Consequences of the First Change in Party Control,” in *Establishing Congress: The Removal to Washington, D.C., and the Election of 1800*, ed. By Kenneth R. Bowling and Donald R. Kennon. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press; pp. 23-38.
- Beisbart, Claus and Luc Bovens. 2008. “A power measure analysis of Amendment 36 in Colorado.” *Public Choice* 134: 231-246.
- Blais, Andre, John H. Aldrich, Indridi Indridason, and Renan Levine. 2006. “Do Voters Vote for Government Coalitions? Testing Downs’ Pessimistic Conclusion,” Party Politics Volume 12 Issue 6, November 2006, pp. 691-7095.
- Blais, Andre and Marc Andre Bodet. 2006. “How do voters form expectations about the Parties Chances of Winning an Election?” *Social Science Quarterly* 87(3):477-493.
- Binder, Sarah. 1997. *Minority Rights, Majority Rule: Partisanship and the Development of Congress*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Brambor, Thomas, William Roberts Clark, and Matt Golder. 2006. “Understanding Interaction Models: Improving Empirical Analyses,” *Political Analysis* 14: 63-82.
- Cox, Gary W. 1997. *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World’s Electoral Systems*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Duverger, Maurice. 1954. *Political Parties*. New York: Wiley.
- Karp, Jeffrey A. 2006. “Political knowledge about electoral rules: Comparing mixed member proportional systems in Germany and New Zealand.” *Electoral Studies* 25(4):714-730.
- Long, J. Scott and Jeremy Freese. 2006. *Regression Models for Categorical and Dependent Variables Using Stata, Second Edition*. College Station, TX: The State Press.

Merolla, Jennifer. 2003. "Too Close for Comfort: Elite Cues and Strategic Voting in Multicandidate Elections," Ph.D. thesis, Duke University.

Rickershauser, Jill, and John Aldrich. 2007. "It's the Electability, Stupid! Or maybe not? Electability, Substance, and Strategic Voting in Presidential Primaries." *Electoral Studies* 26(2):371:380.

Figure 1. Ordered Probit Predicted Probabilities: Support for Proportionality by Vote Choice and Perceptions of which candidate will win state

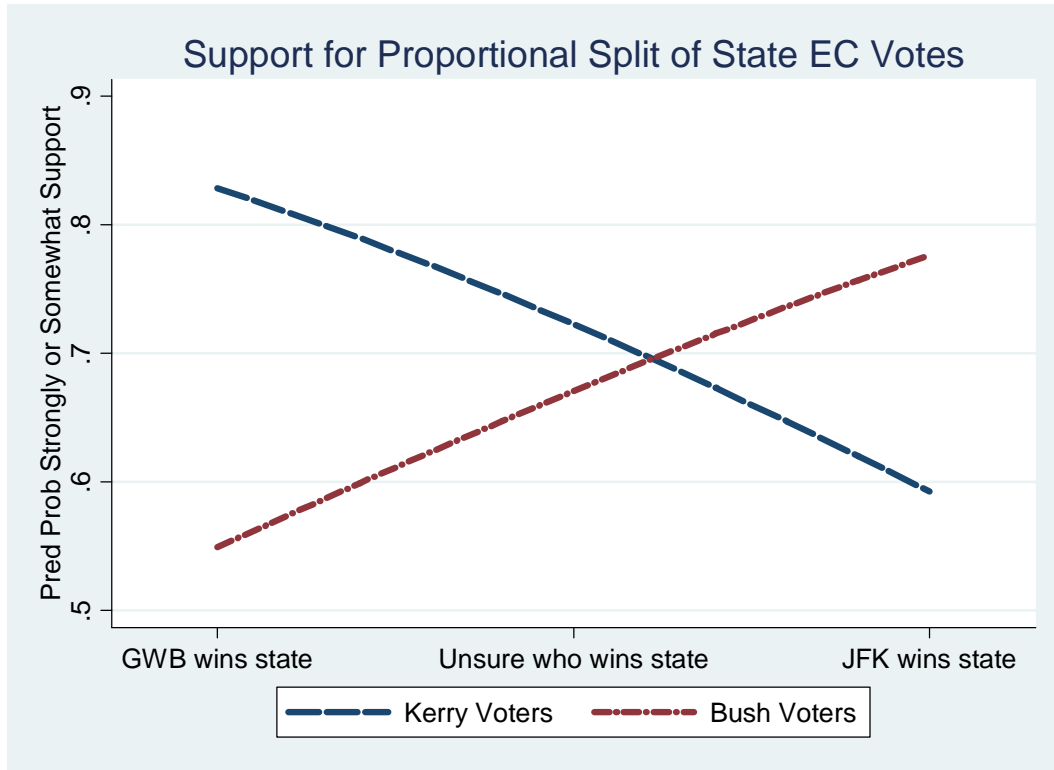


Figure 2. Ordered Probit Predicted Probabilities: Support for Proportionality by Vote Choice, Perceptions of which candidate will win state, and Support for Constitutional Amendment to Abolish Electoral College

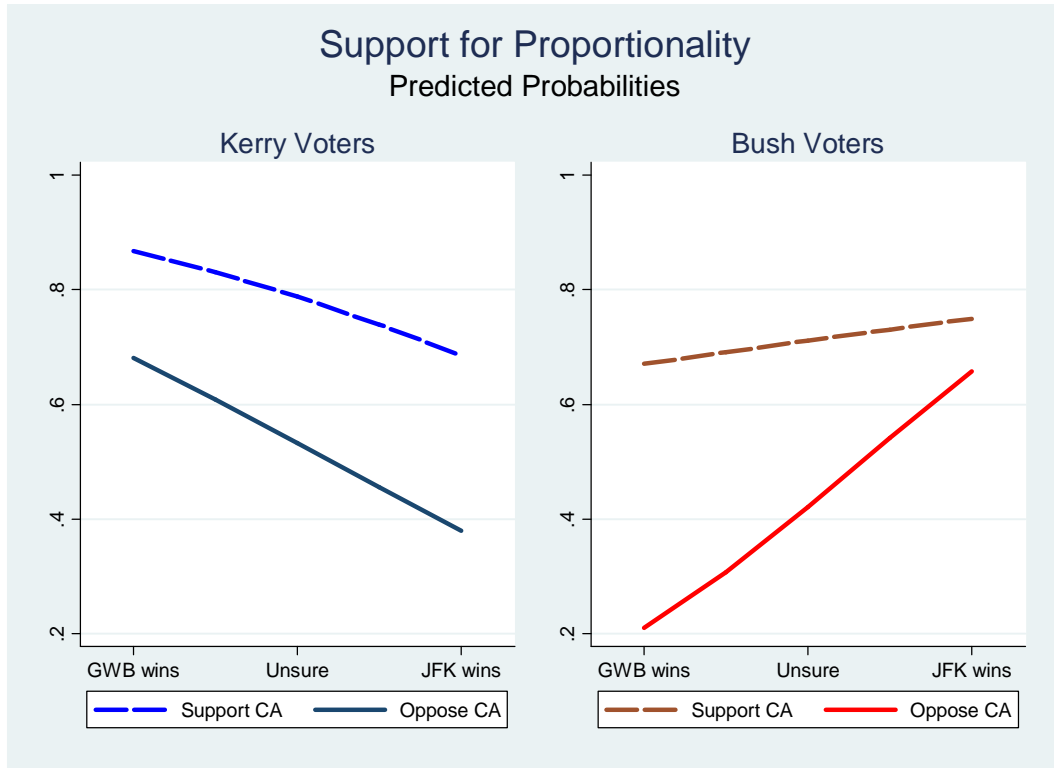


Table 1. Colorado Amendment 36 Pre-election and Exit Polling

	Total	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Survey USA poll (10/5-10/7)				
Yes	45%	59%	46%	33%
No	44%	30%	43%	55%
Undecided	12%	11%	11%	12%
Survey USA poll (10/18-10/20)				
Yes	38%	57%	38%	24%
No	55%	35%	56%	70%
Undecided	7%	8%	6%	6%
Survey USA poll (10/28-10/30)				
Yes	32%	47%	36%	18%
No	65%	50%	61%	80%
Undecided	2%	3%	2%	2%
Survey USA poll (10/28-10/30)				
Yes	35%	53%	41%	17%
No	62%	44%	56%	81%
Undecided	3%	3%	3%	2%
Colorado Exit Poll				
Yes	34.10%	56%	40%	13%
No	65.90%	44%	60%	87%
	Total	Kerry Voters	Bush Voters	
Colorado Exit Poll				
Yes	34.10%	58%	13%	
No	65.90%	42%	87%	

Table 2. Support for Proportionality by Vote Choice and Electoral Context

Support for Proportionality	Total	Kerry Voters		Bush Voters	
		Bush State	Gore State	Bush State	Gore State
Strongly Support	30%	42%	36%	20%	26%
Somewhat support	33%	33%	32%	31%	38%
Somewhat Oppose	14%	11%	11%	18%	16%
Strongly Oppose	23%	15%	22%	32%	21%

Table 3. Ordered Probit Results: Support splitting state's Electoral College votes proportionally to state Presidential vote

	Model 1 All Voters	Model 2 Kerry Voters	Model 3 Bush Voters
Perceptions of which candidate will win state	0.02 (0.03)	0.179*** (0.05)	-0.158*** (0.05)
Vote choice	0.04 (0.03)		
Support for Constitutional Amendment for popular vote winner	0.458*** (0.04)	0.390*** (0.07)	0.503*** (0.05)
Sex	-0.129 (0.08)	-0.176 (0.11)	-0.035 (0.10)
Age	0.051* (0.02)	0.014 (0.03)	0.059 (0.03)
Income	0.005 (0.01)	0.004 (0.01)	0.008 (0.01)
Education	-0.098* (0.04)	-0.130* (0.06)	-0.054 (0.06)
State winner * Vote choice	-0.093*** (0.02)		
<i>Cut Points</i>			
First cut point	0.315 (0.22)	0.033 (0.31)	0.576* (0.29)
Second cut point	1.313*** (0.22)	0.955** (0.32)	1.617*** (0.29)
Third cut point	1.759*** (0.22)	1.318*** (0.32)	2.151*** (0.30)
Observations	842	404	459

Standard Errors in parentheses

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 4. Ordered Probit Results: Support splitting state's Electoral College votes proportionally to state Presidential vote

	Model 4	Model 5 Kerry Voters	Model 6 Bush Voters
State Winner	0.063 (0.04)	0.158** (0.05)	-0.058 (0.06)
Vote Choice	0.080** (0.03)		
Amendment	0.746*** (0.11)	0.717*** (0.19)	0.756*** (0.12)
Sex	-0.145 (0.08)	-0.167 (0.11)	-0.066 (0.10)
Age	0.033 (0.02)	-0.005 (0.03)	0.053 (0.03)
Income	0.007 (0.01)	0.001 (0.01)	0.021 (0.01)
Education	-0.084* (0.04)	-0.111 (0.06)	-0.039 (0.06)
State Winner * Vote Choice	-0.060** (0.02)		
State Winner * Amendment (Dummy)	-0.09 (0.08)	0.036 (0.12)	-0.245** (0.09)
Vote Choice * Amendment (Dummy)	-0.01 (0.06)		
State Winner * Vote Choice * Amendment (Dummy)	-0.066 (0.04)		
<i>Cut Points</i>			
First cut point	-0.454* (0.20)	-0.569* (0.28)	-0.227 (0.27)
Second cut point	0.522** (0.20)	0.33 (0.28)	0.797** (0.27)
Third cut point	0.971*** (0.20)	0.694* (0.28)	1.334*** (0.28)
Observations	842	404	459

Standard Errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Appendix – Question wording and coding

Support for proportional split of Electoral College votes (Dependent Variable in all regression models)

Individual states can divide their Electoral College votes in proportion to the state's popular vote without a Constitutional Amendment. For example, citizens in Colorado will vote in November on a law that would divide its 9 Electoral College votes proportional to the popular vote in Colorado, starting with the current Presidential election. If this ballot initiative passes, the winning candidate would usually get 5 Electoral College votes (instead of 9 like in the current system), and the losing candidate would usually get 4 Electoral College votes (instead of zero like in the current system). Thinking about **(INSERT STATE)** and its **(##)** Electoral College votes in the current election between George W. Bush and John Kerry, would you

- 1 Strongly support a law that divides **(INSERT STATE)**'s Electoral College votes proportional to the popular vote in **(INSERT STATE)** (30%)
- 2 Somewhat support a law that divides **(INSERT STATE)**'s Electoral College votes proportional to the popular vote in **(INSERT STATE)** (33%)
- 3 Somewhat oppose a law that divides **(INSERT STATE)**'s Electoral College votes proportional to the popular vote in **(INSERT STATE)** (14%)
- 4 Strongly oppose a law that divides **(INSERT STATE)**'s Electoral College votes proportional to the popular vote in **(INSERT STATE)** (23%)

Subjective judgment of who will win at state level (State)

In the current Presidential election between George W. Bush and John Kerry (**ROTATE ORDER**), which candidate do you think will win the popular vote in **(INSERT STATE)**?

- 2 George W. Bush will almost certainly win the popular vote in **(INSERT STATE)** (19%)
- 1 George W. Bush will probably win the popular vote in **(INSERT STATE)** (22%)
- 0 Both George W. Bush and John Kerry have about equal chance winning the popular vote in **(INSERT STATE)** (20%)
- 1 John Kerry will probably win the popular vote in **(INSERT STATE)** (21%)
- 2 John Kerry will almost certainly win the popular vote in **(INSERT STATE)** (17%)

Support for a Constitutional Amendment to replace the Electoral College with the national popular vote winner (Amendment)

Replacing the Electoral College with the national popular vote winner would require a Constitutional Amendment. Would you say that you:

- 1 Strongly favor a Constitutional Amendment that replaces the Electoral College with the national popular vote (39%)
- 2 Somewhat favor a Constitutional Amendment that replaces the Electoral College with the national popular vote (34%)
- 3 Somewhat oppose a Constitutional Amendment that replaces the Electoral College with the national popular vote (13%)
- 4 Strongly oppose a Constitutional Amendment that replaces the Electoral College with the national popular vote (14%)

Vote Choice

- 2 Kerry (41%)
- 1 Lean Kerry (7%)
- 0 Undecided (2%)
- 1 Lean Bush (5%)
- 2 Bush (45%)

Sex

- 1 Male (48%)
- 2 Female (52%)

Age

- 1 18-24 (9%)
- 2 25-34 (17%)
- 3 35-44 (20%)
- 4 45-54 (19%)
- 5 55-64 (18%)
- 6 65-74 (12%)
- 7 75+ (5%)

Education

- 1 High School graduate or less (45%)
- 2 Some College or Associate's Degree (30%)
- 3 Bachelor's Degree (15%)
- 4 Graduate or Professional degree (9%)