

## Swing States: Trade, Media, and the Electoral College

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### **Introduction: What is a swing state?**

Swing states are commonly known as purple states. This refers to states which are won by one of the majority parties, Democrat or Republican, and have similar levels of support among voters, therefore, creating competitive elections (Henderson 2017). These battleground states hold the key to winning the election due to their party division. “In Presidential contests, the 50 U.S. states are divided by political campaigns, and responsively by the news media, into safe states that do not merit attention and swing states that are winnable by either campaign” (Fraga 2010, 342).

After reviewing the recent Virginia elections, I was originally intrigued by the notion of how state legislatures play a role in swing states. Further expounding this theory, I investigated the 2016 presidential election discrepancy between the electoral college and popular vote, which proved that a few swing states determined President Trump’s victory. Even though, Democratic [presidential candidate Hillary] Clinton (Saad 2008) captured swing states with more electoral votes and more conservative (red state) majorities, the election was won by President Trump with 107,000 votes in the swing states of Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan which account for 46 electors (Meko 2016). During every Presidential election, 270 electoral votes are required to win out of 538 electors. The 538 electoral college votes comprise the House of Representatives and the Senate seats (Henderson 2017). This led me to inquire about the factors that create swing states and how this imbalance could threaten the political arena.

What influence do swing states have during elections and why does that matter? This research question helped me rank the influence levels of swing states. In this literature review, I will argue if swing states have a major, moderate, or no influence in elections by utilizing media and coercion bias, electoral results, demographics, economics, and political campaigns as key persuasive factors. Each school of thought will discuss these influence levels. I will argue that swing states have *a major* influence in elections because of fake news, the media, and the electoral college. Press, polls, and politicization are some circumstances that determine the significant influence of swing states.

This paper proceeds by discussing each school of thought. First, I will argue that swing states have a major influence in elections. Second, I will argue that swing states have a moderate influence in elections. Third, I will argue that swing states have no influence in elections. Lastly, I will claim that swing states have a major influence in elections best answers my research question by identifying a hypothesis to operationalize.

## **Body: Three Schools of Thought**

**School of Thought #1: Swing states have *a major* influence in elections because of fake news, social media, and the electoral college.**

Purple swing states lead to tough victories as indicated in bottom line and survey results. Social Media Content is misinformed, and specifically polarized results were higher in swing states which is a strategic maneuver. The Winner-Take-All system used in every state except for

Maine and Nebraska has created political tension, since it allows small swing states to have as much as an effect as large populous ones (Duquette 2017, 47).

## **Fake News and Social Media**

Twitter surveys, shared usage, and pinpointing specific examples from Russia, WikiLeaks, and Junk New Sources typify that fake news and social media influence elections in swing states. With President Trump's accused ties to Russia, this comes as no surprise to me of the rise in fake news during his presidency. "Many of the swing states getting highly concentrated doses of polarizing content were also among those with large numbers of votes in the Electoral College"; this content also known as fake news represents the extremism to persuade voters by appealing to their emotions over the information by news outlets (Howard 2018). The fake news argument justifies swing states having a major influence as certain populations will tend to vote based off the concentration of media content in their area. Local media and online presence have higher political efficiency. First-time voters have given more attention to internet media, while established voters rely on TV presence (Ha 2013, 212). Advertisements are more common in swing states, where voters have greater influence over the outcome due to the Electoral College system (Levy et al. 2016). Efficacy should be divided by external and internal concepts. Internal political efficacy should be categorized as a participatory democracy dealing with individuals' feelings. External political efficacy refers to mobilization of support, associated with the government's responsiveness (206). Media can be compared to

efficacy, since involvement in public affairs promotes political expression. Furthermore, survey shows that an increase in mobile technology and social media over hard paper news formats leads to higher positive political efficacy (208-10). In terms of efficacy, there is also geographical factors to consider. For example, the Mountain Midwest political rise continues to go unreported leading to “superficial understanding” of changes in the area (Teixeira 2012, 15). This understanding can be clarified by voting patterns and “delineating our regions of analysis and discussing population growth patterns for the state as whole and for each region”, focusing on minorities, college graduates, working-class, and seniors (2012, 11-2). Fake news and social media significantly impact swing states voter outcome.

### **The Electoral College and Voter Decisions**

Democrats and Republicans attempt to sway voters by implementing policies to their liking essentially ‘swinging’ an individual in a direction. A claim can be made that this argument is similar to swing states, but on a much smaller scale (Hill 2017, 131-133). Electoral college systems create the necessity for battleground strategies with each state having one elector per member of House of Representatives and two for Senators, favoring more populous states and those with more liberal and conservative views (Norpoth 2017, 1-3). Presidential hopefuls must now flock to rural America to garner more electoral votes from states like Wisconsin, Iowa, and New Mexico which combined are enough votes of one populous state (Zeleny 2004, 1). Drawing attention to the negative impacts of the electoral college system in the 2000 and 2016 presidential elections, the flaws have become obvious, drastically altering voter decision. These rural states tend to consist of voters with lower political engagement, therefore making it easier

to convince them to change their ideological perspectives. United States voter ideology has also changed overtime, ever since separation from England, determined that our government “derive its powers from the consent of the governed” (LaVigne 2014, 508). In the 1800s, the fourteenth and fifteenth amendment of the United States Constitution conferred citizens and prohibited the federal government from denying citizens the right to vote based off of discriminatory factors. The lack of political and civic engagement in swing states, combined with lower educational achievements, make individuals prime targets receptive to influencing voter outcome.

**School of Thought #2: Swing states have a moderate influence in elections due to economic activity and demographics.**

Political schizophrenia is ever changing between Republicans and Democrats. Trade policy, socioeconomics, and income levels are analyzed in the presence of swing votes, further addressing electoral incentive.

**Income, Industry, and Socioeconomics**

The United States surplus of trade including economic activity, such as imports and exports, job security, and manufacturing prove to be moderate influential voting factors that affect swing states, specifically those with heavy industry ties that provide political capital for the electoral college. Trade policy is analyzed in the electoral college in presence of swing votes, further addressing electoral incentive. As Jensen states, “job insecurity from import competition in manufacturing diminishes political support for incumbents” (2017, 423). Circumstances under

which incumbent politicians have incentive to build reputation for protectionism, therefore improving their re-election probability through trade protection policy by conducting empirical tests (Muûls 2013). The demography of Virginia has changed because most residents are transplants, liberal at that. The only southern republicans that exist are the few tobacco and coal people from the Western rural ends of the state, which are “sparsely populated with low voter turnout”. The diversity of the people and the economy has kept Virginia at low unemployment rate, contributed to the tech industry, and allowed for various immigrants to settle. Virginia citizens favor Republicans’ attitudes toward the business climate but favor the socially moderate feeling of the Democrats. (“The Incomer Effect” 2012). When debating this school of thought, it must be considered that socioeconomic status results in a disproportionate burden of income.

**School of Thought #3: Swing states have *no* influence in elections. The real problem is swing voters, state legislatures, and redistricting maps.**

If swing states have no influence, then what is the real problem in affecting legislatures voting. Electoral change is possible when voters make decisions based off the hierarchical model and campaign motivation, and incentives. Furthermore, state legislatures may still be influenced by gerrymandering.

### **States and Gerrymandering**

Are swing voters or swing states the real problem in affecting legislatures voting?  
Through the analysis of data in high schools, the increased youth political engagement and

interest in one swing state demonstrated “the implications for education in democratic societies” (Levy et al. 2016). While Democrats have made gains in the 2018 Midterm elections, the question still remains, have state legislatures been changed enough to allow for redistricting and the end of gerrymandering? Sean Illing (2008) finds that governors and state representatives, not the House, is responsible for redrawing maps for the 2020 election. The state legislature elections in November 2018 have proven to be more key to political interests, rather than federal elections. Only “successive generational waves” will create long term political fairness. “Trump’s unpopularity is likely to give state-level Democrats a big boost”, but American federalism is skeptical in nature. While state governments are meant to be closer to citizens, people often rank state officials in comparison to the viewpoints of Trump or other officials without regard to their local and state level achievements (Yglesias 2018). Democrats have gained ground in state races, but most continue to do so to succeed for the next decade. I agree redistricting will continue to shape the political structure of America. I disagree that redistricting applies only to swing states, as it impacts all districts. Redistricting has continued to create gerrymandering throughout the continental United States.

## **Conclusion: Swing States Level of Influence**

My foregoing arguments demonstrate that swing states have various levels of influences, some more important than others. The above research supports my claim that swing states have a major influence in voter outcomes due to fake news, social media, and the electoral college construction. Others believe that swing states have a moderate influence over voter outcomes as controversy exists between Republicans’ pro-business perspective and Democrats’ liberal social

leanings. I refute the counter-argument that swing states have no influence in voter arguments and that the real problem is redistricting and gerrymandering.

In a comparison of voters, those who live in swing states are more likely to be influenced by misinformed media than those who live elsewhere. This hypothesis can be operationalized by surveying the advertisements in swing states featuring multiple media modalities. This qualitative data will show voter discrepancies and patterns between swing states and the rest of America.

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