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Sophisticated *and* myopic? Citizen preferences for Electoral College reform

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Abstract Different institutions can produce more (or less) preferred outcomes, in terms of citizens' preferences. Consequently, citizen preferences over institutions may "inherit"—to use William Riker's term—the features of preferences over outcomes. But the level of information and understanding required for this effect to be observable seems quite high. In this paper, we investigate whether Riker's intuition about citizens acting on institutional preferences is borne out by an original empirical dataset collected for this purpose. These data, a survey commissioned specifically for this project, were collected as part of a larger nationally representative sample conducted right before the 2004 election. The results show that support for a reform to split a state's Electoral College votes proportionally is explained by (1) which candidate one supports, (2) which candidate one thinks is likely to win the election under the existing system of apportionment, (3) preferences for abolishing the Electoral College in favor of the popular vote winner, and (4) statistical interactions between these variables. In baldly political terms, Kerry voters tend to support splitting their state's Electoral College votes if they felt George W. Bush was likely to win in that state. But Kerry voters who expect Kerry to win their state favor winner-take-all Electoral College rules for their state. In both cases, *mutatis mutandis*, the reverse is true for Bush voters.

Keywords William Riker · Strategic voting · Electoral college · Institutions · Majority rule

> *The factual question of whether people take advantage of [strategic voting] opportunities is difficult to answer. . . . It does seem quite likely that strategic voting occurs quite frequently. . .* (Riker 1982: 167)

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> *. . . We should never take the results of any method always to be a fair and true amalgamation of voters' judgments . . . We should think of the methods, I believe, simply as convenient ways of doing business, useful but flawed*. (Riker 1982: 113)

1 Introduction

Since the publication of *Liberalism Against Populism* (Riker 1982), political science has amassed a large body of evidence demonstrating strategic behavior at both the elite and mass levels. Legislators understand that voting rules shape how decisions are made, and adapt their political strategies accordingly.

More generally, political elites understand institutional rules in terms represented by "agenda trees," and realize that they may have to 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. Strategic voting may appear unseemly, but it is difficult to judge pejoratively those who understand how to manipulate social choice aggregation procedures while also staying within the rules.

Riker's argument had two key premises. First, in terms of outcomes, different voting rules take identical reported preference orderings and map them into quite different results. Second, in terms of logical and moral primitives, many different voting rules are acceptable. Taken together, these two conclusions—argued extensively in *Liberalism Against Populism*—mean that disagreement and strategic attempts to manipulate voting rules are well within the normal competitive ambit of "politics" in a democracy.

Nonetheless, there do appear to many people to be important differences between (a) changing the rules because the new rules seem objectively more fair or more transparent, and (b) changing the rules because the group with the power to change the rules expects thereby to achieve a more preferred outcome.[1]

One might expect that adherence to pure preferences for fair rules unsullied by calculations of immediate political advantage may not be compelling to political elites whose fortunes are directly affected. But fairness may be more compelling to ordinary citizens who are mostly just spectators in the political game. With more room for detachment, most citizens may be concerned about fairness and continuity in rules, even if the rules are not—in the short run at least—beneficial to their political loyalties and preferences. And of course this trade-off, if it exists, would require that voters understand the significance of strategic considerations as opposed to those of pure fairness.

What this means is that occasions when voters vote on changing the rules provide especially interesting opportunities for gauging the relative weights of normative and strategic considerations. In this paper we try to take advantage of just such a situation, which provides a natural experiment for students of strategic voting on rule changes. The particular setting we examine is a rule change in the Electoral College, or more precisely in state rules that map vote totals into allocations of Electoral College votes. The alternatives we presented

[1] That doesn't mean that people don't try, of course. As Binder (2006: 514), Dion (1997: 22), and Fink (2000: 1111) have shown, legislators will support proposals that would advantage partisan interests over fairness, even if the fairness objections appear to be powerful and compelling. All three of these examples involve different periods in the history of the US House of Representatives, but that body (like the US Electoral College) has very clear rules. If similar actions take place in the US Senate, or in parliamentary systems, it is much easier to disguise the motivation and effects.

were to stay with the status quo system ("winner take all") or to switch to a proportional procedure.[2]

We commissioned a survey specifically to investigate this question. The questions were included as part of a larger nationwide sample collected just before the 2004 US presidential election. The results indicate 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 carry the state. 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. Thus, our conclusions tend to support Riker's intuition that debates over rules can be understood by ordinary citizens, and that their choices can be influenced by strategic considerations.

2 Strategic *and* myopic

"Myopic" behavior, for our purposes, is an action that is focused on local, or short-term, considerations, at the possible expense of national, or long-term, considerations.[3] That is, if a rule change is advocated for local or state elections, but not for the entire polity, then advocating such a change might be myopic if the local benefits are outweighed by larger strategic considerations on the wider, national stage. On the other hand, a rule change is also myopic if the benefits are narrow and immediate. The current majority party might benefit from stronger rules or restricting access to others now, but may regret the policy change in the future.

"Strategic" behavior, on the other hand, involves any misrepresentation or attempt to manipulate outcomes *within the rules* of the voting process, or to *effect a change in the rules*, that will make a desired outcome more likely. It has long been known that when confronted with more than two options, citizens may behave strategically, or "vote the LOTE" ("Lesser of Two Evils"). This vote is strategic in the sense that the voter throws her support behind a candidate or party other than her sincerely first-ranked preference. This misrepresentation, in the voter's mind, loses a vote for a preferred candidate who has no hope of winning—a vote that would have in effect been "wasted" —while gaining a vote for a less preferred candidate to prevent a detested candidate or party from winning.

Strategic behavior—in British parlance, "tactical voting"—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 rule schemes such that voters are willing to abandon their first choice candidate for a less preferred candidate who has a better chance of winning overall. Abramson et al. (2004, 2010), and also Blais et al. (2006) show that strategic behavior is common in proportional rule systems, even those with a low "threshold" for securing seats.

But our subject, as was often the case for Riker also, is the US system, and the implications of a federal structure for elections. In this regard, Duverger (1954) points out that

[2]Maine and Nebraska already use a kind of "district-based" system, with two electors being chosen "at large," and the remainder being selected by district majorities. This system is not, strictly speaking, proportional. If one candidate wins 55 % of the state vote, and wins majorities in each district, he or she wins all of the Electoral College votes.

[3]We appreciate the advice of an anonymous reviewer, who helped clarify this section.

strategic voting in "first-past-the-post" electoral arrangements tends to concentrate votes on the top two parties (see Cox 1997 for a formalization). Likewise, Abramson et al. (1992) and Rickershauser and Aldrich (2007) show that electability may be a central concern in US primary elections. Merolla (2003) shows that voters appear responsive to elite cues about strategic voting in the 2000 US presidential election.

The key question in Riker (1980) was not strategic behavior in voting for candidates. Riker assumed that voters would by and large choose candidates strategically, and this assumption has since been vindicated, in the studies we have cited and others. Further, Riker himself established that elites often acted strategically in choosing or opposing rules. The interesting question for Riker took one more step back: To what extent might *ordinary voters* recognize and act on strategic impulses in choosing or opposing *rule changes*? Importantly, since our sample is national and not taken only from states actually considering a rule change, the results go some way toward indicating whether strategic considerations appear to come into play even in the absence of elite cues.

3 Electoral College: rules, representation, and strategy

3.1 History

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 selection 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 statewide 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 statewide electoral outcome and thereby won all of the state's Electoral College votes for their party's candidate. As it happened the nation was in very close political balance; the changes affected each state individually, but overall the changes cancelled each other out in the nationwide results.

But there was a larger issue, a problem that trades off essential fairness of rules against partisan goals and strategies. Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to Colonel James Monroe on January 12, 1800, recognized the problem of trading off political strategy against procedural fairness this way:

> On the subject of an election by a general ticket, or by districts, most persons here seem to have made up their minds. All agree that an election by districts would be best, if it could be general; but while ten States choose either by their legislatures or by a general ticket, it is folly and worse than folly for the other six not to do it. In these ten States the minority is certainly unrepresented, and their majorities not only have the weight of their whole State in their scale, but have the benefit of so much of our minorities as can succeed at a district election. This is, in fact, ensuring to our minorities the appointment of the government. To state it in another form, it is merely a question whether we will divide the United States into sixteen or one hundred and thirty-seven districts. The latter being more chequered, and representing the people in smaller sections, would be more likely to be an exact representation of their diversified sentiments. But a representation of a part by great, and part by small

> sections; would give a result very different from what would be the sentiment of the whole people of the United States, were they assembled together. (Jefferson 1904; quoted in Wilmerding 1958: 60)

It may be no surprise that Adams, Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe understood the consequences of the rules and acted accordingly. But can ordinary citizens connect the arcane rules of apportionment with their goals as voters, and (in the modern United States) party identifiers? The Electoral College has always been controversial. In early elections, the dominant party in state legislatures regularly fiddled with allocation rules to try to gain a temporary advantage.[4]

Moreover, many states listed electors (not presidential candidates) by name on the ballot throughout the nineteenth century, making it clear that the Electoral College was in fact an ephemeral legislature, in which particular institutional choices might have large impacts. The arguments over the allocation of Electoral College votes are interesting precisely because they present tensions between the motivations of myopic partisanship and abstract procedural fairness.

Maine and Nebraska converted (in 1972 and 1991, respectively) their apportionment system to the "two at large, the rest districts" plan. Other states, including Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina and Virginia have considered reforms at different points over the 50 years leading up to the 2004 elections.

At the national level (which Jefferson would not have thought "folly"), the Lodge-Gossett Amendment in 1949 (Bennett 1951) would have abolished the position of presidential elector and required each state to allocate its electoral votes to candidates precisely in proportion (where proportion was measured to three decimal places!) to the popular votes received by the candidates in each state. While the proposed constitutional amendment passed the Senate, it failed in the House, and was never sent to the states for possible ratification. The "Celler Amendment" (House Joint Resolution 681)—which would have abolished the Electoral College altogether and replaced it with direct elections—passed the House in 1969, but failed in the Senate.[5]

Most recently, the National Popular Vote plan is a way that states could act unilaterally and yet cooperate.[6] The mechanism by which this would be accomplished is an interstate compact. If a bloc of states controlling 270 votes could act as a compact, they could effectively finesse the Electoral College by committing themselves to vote for the national popular vote winner.[7]

Riker (1980) argued that institutions are "congealed tastes." If so, in spite of the frequent attempts to change the rules, the Electoral College is firmly congealed. Miller (2012) argues

[4] As late as the 1890 election, the Democrats took control of the Michigan state legislature, and converted to a modified "district plan" that was expected to benefit the Democratic presidential candidate, Grover Cleveland. The Republican, Benjamin Harrison, "won" the state, but because of the district apportionment Harrison received only nine Electoral College votes, with the other five votes going to the Democrat, Grover Cleveland. This meant that the Republican Harrison netted only four votes (nine minus five), instead of the full 14. The Republicans retook control of the state legislature in 1892, and converted back to "winner take all" (Moore 1985: 266–267).

[5] There were two very similar amendments, the Bayh Amendment and the Celler Amendment, which would have reformed the Electoral College in 1969 and 1970. But threats of filibuster and parliamentary maneuvers prevented a clean vote from ever being taken. Since the required vote was two/thirds, it is by no means clear that either amendment would have passed in any case. Details can be found in the CQ *Almanac* (1971: 840).

[6] By "unilateral" reform, we mean laws enacted by a single state legislature that would change the way that state casts its electoral votes.

[7] At the time of this writing, states accounting for 132 votes have signed on, with Maryland going first.

persuasively that, quite separate from whether the Electoral College is good public policy, it has been very useful for students of political institutions and election strategies. Miller lists nine ways that the Electoral College "is a terrific boon for political science (and public choice) research." For the reasons that Miller advances, there are almost constant calls for reform of the system, with a variety of schemes and proposals being put forward in nearly every electoral cycle. The reactions to these proposals are different in different states, because the advantages and disadvantages are complex and affect states differently.

3.2 More recently: the 2004 election

For the 2004 election, as today, 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 its Electoral College votes. At least two states—Colorado and California—have recently entertained unilateral Electoral College reforms, just the sort that Jefferson called "folly and worse than folly." In 2004, Colorado offered a ballot initiative to voters that gave citizens the opportunity to amend the state constitution to change its allocation of electors based on the popular vote. Rather than winner-take-all, electors would be awarded in whole numbers (since a state cannot abolish the office of elector), but approximately proportional to vote totals in the state. In practical terms, this would mean that rather than nine electors being up for grabs in Colorado, the Electoral College votes would almost certainly have been split five-four, unilaterally reducing Colorado's influence (Beisbart and Bovens 2008).[8]

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, and the chief opponents were Republicans, since Colorado had been a "Red State" in nine of 10 previous presidential elections. The only exception was 1992.[9]

But lest one think that views on Electoral College reform reflected national partisan differences, a ballot measure with similar effects neatly reversed the party stances in California, a "Blue State." In 2008, Republican political operatives attempted to gather enough signatures for a ballot initiative that would have allocated California's Electoral College votes in a congressional district-based system, like Maine and Nebraska. Democrats opposed, in Blue California in 2008, the same measure they had supported, and in fact had introduced, in Red Colorado in 2004.

What our analysis does is to pose the same question—asked by the elite partisan efforts in Colorado and California—to a national mass audience. Would voters favor the reform? Would support or opposition depend on the partisan majority in state where the voter lives? And would support or opposition, as Riker (1980) would have predicted, depend on the interaction between the state's current partisan majority and the particular voter's own partisan identification?

The null hypothesis is that voters might not know enough to have a consistent view. Alternatively, supporters of the reform might simply focus on procedural fairness in their own state, without regard to partisan advantage. Our question, then, is whether we might expect preferences for fair rules to prevail over strategic considerations, partisan advantage, and party loyalty. This requires that voters recognize the implication of the rule change

[8] However, the "Whole Number Proportional" Plan might have confusing and unexpected results if applied nationwide. Had the reform been in place for the 2000 election, it would have thrown the election into the House of Representatives: Gore 269, Bush 263, Nader 6.

[9] In 1992, Bill Clinton carried Colorado, but with only 40.13 % of the vote, compared to 35.87 % for George H. W. Bush and 23.32 % for Ross Perot.

of diluting the power of their votes, regardless of which party wins the Electoral College votes of the state, but that the attraction of an intrinsically better rule swamps that strategic consideration. What we cannot measure, of course, is the total attractiveness of the rule change, alone. All we can see is how voters weigh the two considerations taken together.

4 Survey data and analysis

We use data from a nationally representative survey of Americans conducted immediately prior to the 2004 election.[10] Specifically, we asked respondents how much they would support a reform, similar to that proposed for Colorado, to allocate the Electoral College vote in proportion to the votes cast by the public in their state.[11] Overall, we expect that support for this state-level reform will be related to voters' desire to abolish the Electoral College and its replacement by a national popular vote. 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.

Importantly, our survey question lacks any elite party cues that could give away the "correct" answer, so we are examining the sophistication of citizen behavior 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 asking respondents directly to identify the candidate they expect to win in their state, rather than relying on significantly blunter measures like recent polls in a given state.[12] 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 1) 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 partisans 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

[10] The survey was conducted online by Knowledge Networks from October 21, 2004 to November 1, 2004. The Knowledge Networks data are equivalent to a national "random digit dialing" sample. For more information on the Knowledge Networks methodology, see http://www.knowledgenetworks.com. For an analysis of the Knowledge Networks panel and their sampling methodology, as well as analysis of mode effects and panel effects, see Dennis et al. (2005).

[11] See the Appendix for complete wording; the question text includes a fairly detailed explanation of the reform.

[12] 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, namely that voters develop preferences for Electoral College reform from, in part, their estimate of their favored candidate's chances in their home state rather than the reverse.

Table 1 Support for proportionality by vote choice and electoral context

Support for proportionality	Total	Kerry voters			Bush voters		
		Bush state	All states	Gore state	Bush state	All states	Gore state
Strongly support	30 %	42 %	41 %	36 %	20 %	22 %	26 %
Somewhat support	33 %	33 %	31 %	32 %	31 %	33 %	38 %
Somewhat oppose	14 %	11 %	11 %	11 %	18 %	16 %	16 %
Strongly oppose	23 %	15 %	17 %	22 %	32 %	28 %	21 %

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 states 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 behaved strategically. What matters is not which candidate won a state in the previous election, but rather which candidate voters think is going to win in the current election.

Given the number of variables in which we are now interested (vote choice, subjective view of who will win, preference for proportionality) and several controls as independent variables, 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 in the respondent's state, preference for abolition of the Electoral College 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:

$$\begin{aligned} Proportionality = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 StateWinner + \beta_2 Vote + \beta_3 StateWinner * Vote \\ & + \beta_4 Amendment + \beta_5 Education + \beta_6 Sex + \beta_7 Age + \beta_8 Income + \varepsilon, \end{aligned}$$

where

- *Proportionality* is support for that respondent's home state adopting a plan to split its electoral votes in proportion to the state presidential popular vote. The variable is a four-point ordinal scale, ranging from "strongly favor" proportionality to "strongly oppose."
- *StateWinner* is a five-point scale of which candidate a respondent thinks 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 prospective vote choice, which runs from −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* has the key coefficient for examining whether or not voters made strategic choices regarding electoral reform. A significant interaction on

Table 2 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	0.179***	−0.158***
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Vote choice	0.04		
	(0.03)		
Support for Constitutional Amendment for popular vote winner	0.458***	0.390***	0.503***
	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.05)
Sex	−0.129	−0.176	−0.035
	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.10)
Age	0.051*	0.014	0.059
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Income	0.005	0.004	0.008
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Education	−0.098*	−0.130*	−0.054
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.06)
State winner ∗ Vote choice	−0.093***		
	(0.02)		
Cut points			
First cut point	0.315	0.033	0.576*
	(0.22)	(0.31)	(0.29)
Second cut point	1.313***	0.955**	1.617***
	(0.22)	(0.32)	(0.29)
Third cut point	1.759***	1.318***	2.151***
	(0.22)	(0.32)	(0.30)
Observations	842	404	459

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

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.[13] The results are presented in Table 2. The first thing that stands out in the results is that the interaction term is significant (Model 1)—the voters' *preference for reform* depends on which party the voters think will *benefit from reform*. In addition, 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

[13]Two other possibilities are OLS and multinomial probit. But OLS estimates will be biased and inconsistent, because the dependent variable is categorical (four possible answers, from "strongly favor" to "strongly oppose"). Multinomial probit, on the other hand, ignores the ordinal information in the categories we use. Consequently, ordered probit is the best compromise, using an MLE estimator to measure the probabilities of changes in categories, and ordering to preserve ordinal information about the boundaries between the categories.

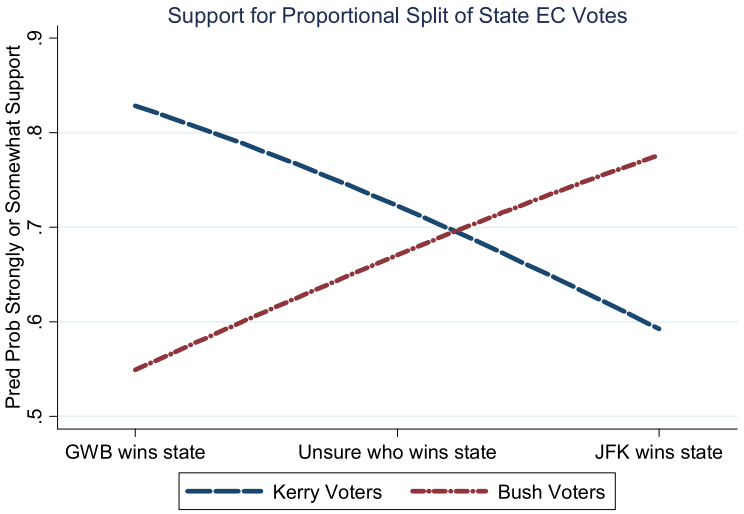

Fig. 1 Ordered probit predicted probabilities: support for proportionality by vote choice and perceptions of which candidate will win state

estimated from Model 1,[14] 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.

In order to understand more clearly the substantive meaning of the significant interaction term $Vote * StateWinner$, we also run separate estimations restricted to the Kerry voters only, and then the Bush voters only (Models 2 & 3 respectively).[15] As expected, *StateWinner* is significant in both models. And as also expected, the signs are significant in opposite directions. Consistent with the hypothesis of strategic voting, Kerry voters favored reform if they expected Bush to win the presidential vote in their state, and less supportive of reform if they expected Kerry to win. Bush voters show the reverse pattern. Support for a constitutional amendment to institute the "National Popular Vote" proposal 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, perhaps because the control variables make a substantial contribution to distinguishing partisanship in the first place. Figure 1 presents predicted probabilities from Models 2 & 3 that quite clearly show this relationship.[16]

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

[14]The predicted probabilities generated using the SPost suite of Stata post-estimation commands (Long and Freese 2006).

[15]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."

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

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 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 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 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 3 presents three additional models, using the same variables as in Models 1–3, with one small exception. To make interpretation of all multiple interactions a little easier, we reduce the four-point scale for *Amendment* to a dummy variable (0 = support amendment abolishing the Electoral College, 1 = oppose). In Model 4, which includes all voters, the three-way interaction term almost reaches significance ($p < 0.1$). Additionally, the two-way interaction between *Vote* and *StateWinner* remains significant. Thus, there is suggestive evidence that in addition to the strategic behavior 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 and 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 vote choices 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 to the state popular vote. Both supporters and "opposers" seem to be equally sophisticated, as can see in the first panel of Fig. 2.

As can be seen in the second panel of Fig. 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, purely normative 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 the electoral climate.

We also estimated the results allowing for nonlinear effects, using dummy variables to split the sample into four parts and allowing the estimation procedure to measure differences, if there are any. These results are depicted in Fig. 3. Panel (a) presents the piecewise estimation for Kerry voters, reflecting a slight improvement in fit (as one would expect when estimating more parameters), but not showing any particular nonlinear pattern.[17] Panel (b),

[17] Allowing for non-linear effects produces a modestly better fit for Kerry voters. Among Kerry voters (including leaners), the Akaike Information Criterion for the simplest possible model using only the ordinal independent variable of respondent's perception of which candidate will win his or her state is 1043.114. If instead we use a series of $k - 1$ dummy variables, the AIC is a modestly better 1042.225. AIC adds a penalty

Table 3 Ordered probit results: support splitting state's Electoral College votes proportionally to state Presidential vote

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

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

presenting the analogous piecewise estimation for Bush voters, shows no reason to believe that the effect is other than linear.

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 instrumental strategizing in their support for a

for estimating additional parameters, so the comparison of fit takes into account the fact that we using more variables in estimation. This penalty for additional parameters helps explain why the non-linear model does no better that the single-predictor model among Bush voters. The AIC for the linear (single-predictor model) is 1159.734, but the AIC is actually higher for the non-linear (dummy variables) model (1164.664).

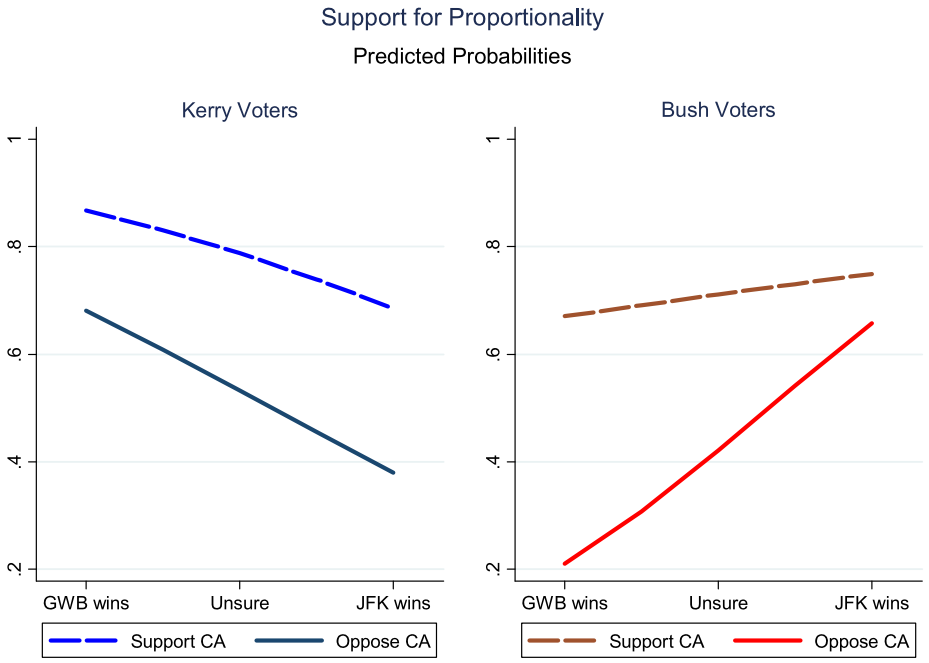

Fig. 2 Ordered probit predicted probabilities: support for proportionality by vote choice, perceptions of which candidate will win state, and support for constitutional amendment to abolish Electoral College

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.

Overall, the pattern of results gives some confidence in the conclusion that voters behaved strategically in voting on Colorado's Amendment 36. The research design we have used is not exactly a classic experiment with a treatment and control. But there is evidence here that voters can reverse their strategic behavior in supporting or opposing essentially identical amendments in different states, where the partisan advantage in the states predicts such a reversal. We believe that our results about citizens exhibiting an understanding of the Electoral College helps confirm other research (Karp 2006) showing that voters can understand complex electoral rules.

5 Conclusion

In this paper we investigate a situation in which respondents were presented with a choice of institutions: Stay with the current system of electoral vote allocation, or switch to a different system. There is a core consideration of basic fairness and pure conceptions of good rules and bad rules. It is likely that this concern is one key to understanding preferences for rules.

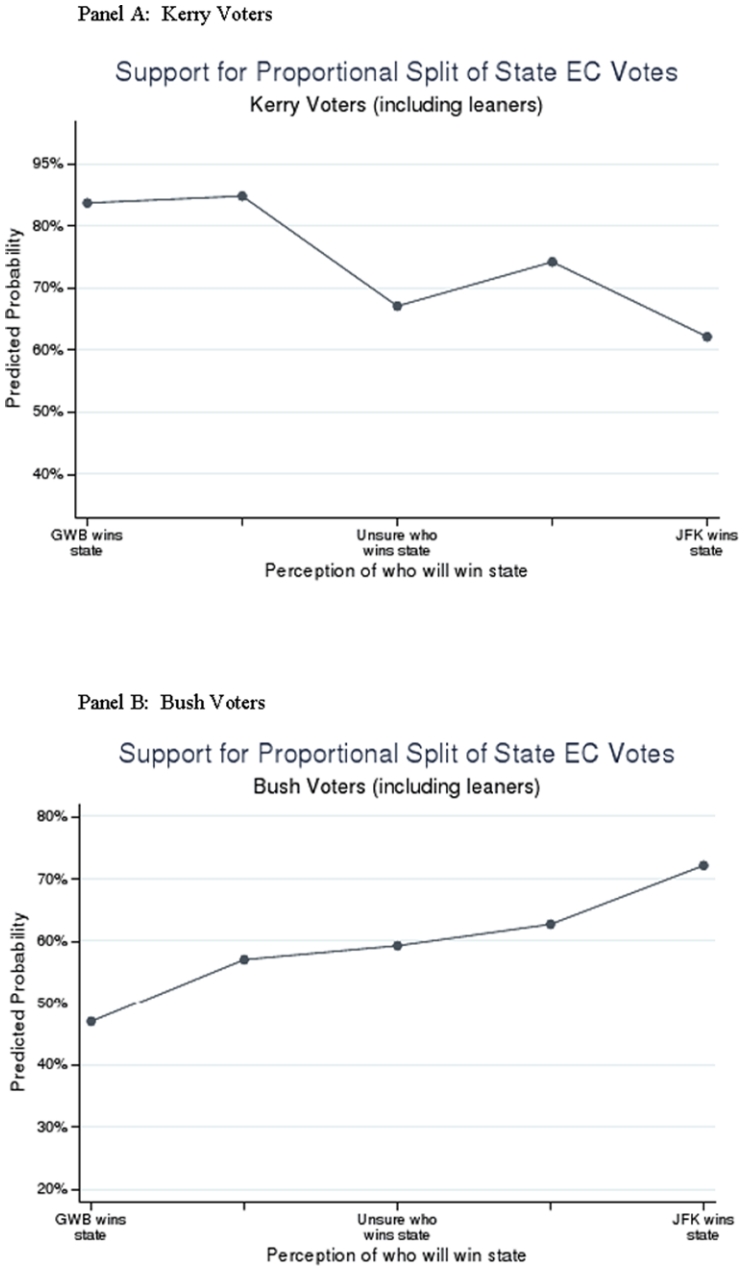

Fig. 3 Piecewise estimation of effects

However, our survey design allows us to try to gauge the net effects of the pure considerations combined with a strategic consideration: Citizens in states where a less preferred candidate is expected to win are more likely to favor proportional allocation of electoral

votes. Citizens in states where the more preferred candidate is expected to win prefer the winner-take-all arrangement.

This work represents a simple, but potentially important, test of one of the core precepts of William Riker's theory of strategy in politics. In a system with disagreement over outcomes, the analyst would expect to see that debates over rules—especially those with implications advantaging one of the outcomes—to "inherit" those original disagreements.

This effect is well established among political elites. But there have been few tests of the claim in mass publics. One problem is that it is not clear if mass publics understand the implications of rule changes well enough to vote strategically. This problem might be solved in states where the issue is actually being debated, because elite cues are available. Our innovation was the commissioning of a new nationwide survey, analyzed for the first time in this paper, that poses the question for citizens in states where the issue is not salient.

Our findings tend to support the Rikerian logic. At the margin, at least, the probability of support for proportional allocation of Electoral College votes, rather than winner-take-all allocation, is strongly related to the voter's perception of political advantage for the more preferred candidate. Thus our survey demonstrates that voters are able to understand the implications of rules changes, and to vote strategically in ways that accomplish instrumental political goals.

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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 %)

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