



Jonathan Robert Cervas &lt;jcervas@uci.edu&gt;

## Political Research Quarterly - Decision on Manuscript ID PRQ-2017-0355

3 messages

**Political Research Quarterly** <onbehalf+prq+okstate.edu@manuscriptcentral.com>

Sun, Nov 12, 2017 at 5:00 PM

Reply-To: prq@okstate.edu

To: jcervas@uci.edu

12-Nov-2017

Dear Mr. Cervas:

We've now received sufficient feedback from external reviewers to reach a decision on "How Malapportioned is the Electoral College?

A Multiple Indicators Historical Perspective: 1790-2016" (PRQ-2017-0355), which you submitted to Political Research Quarterly. All the reviewers' comments appear at the foot of this letter and/or in the attached files.

Based on these reports and our own reading of the manuscript, we must decline the opportunity to publish it in PRQ. This decision brings the review process to a close.

As a generalist journal of political science, PRQ prioritizes scholarship that either (a) makes progress on big questions that engage scholars across multiple subfield or methodological backgrounds, or (b) makes exceptional contributions within specialized fields. Regrettably, we do not see enough potential on either of these counts to proceed further with your manuscript. We do hope that a careful reading of the reviewers' comments will furnish you with useful ideas for refining and targeting your research in the future.

Please note that our editorial tenure is committed to making PRQ a venue where all authors, regardless of final decision, get constructive feedback by serious and qualified reviewers. If you have any comments (positive or negative) about your experience with our review process, we'd appreciate hearing from you and would treat your feedback confidentially.

Thank you for considering Political Research Quarterly for the publication of your research. We hope that you will continue to submit your manuscripts to the journal.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Hayward, Jeanette Mendez, & James Scott - Editors  
Political Research Quarterly  
[prq@okstate.edu](mailto:prq@okstate.edu)

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Reviewer: 1

### Comments to the Author

The authors examine malapportionment in the Electoral College and conclude that "common wisdom about the extent of malapportionment in the EC is exaggerated" and the effects of EC malapportionment are "commonly overstated."

In support of these conclusions they demonstrate (1) "the EC is far less malapportioned than the US Senate," (2) "the EC in population terms looks remarkably proportional," (3) "Gini value of EC seat allocations" ... "is minuscule compared to" ... "Gini inequalities in incomes in the U.S. across states," and (4) "contemporary levels of malapportionment are below historical levels, returning to levels not seen since the mid 19th century."

The premise of the piece is that "common wisdom" is that the Electoral College is "badly malapportioned." Not familiar with anyone who has argued that, I looked through the paper for references to the literature making this claim. Here is every reference to the bunk that the authors seek to debunk:

(a) "... the claim that the U.S. Electoral College is very badly malapportioned ..." (Abstract)

(b) "... common wisdom about the extent of malapportionment in the EC is exaggerated." (Abstract)

(c) "... given the overweighting of small states induced by the two seat federal bonus, it would seem that there can be little dispute that the Electoral College is badly malapportioned." (p1, par 1).

(d) "... those who think the Electoral College is badly malapportioned ..." (p1, par 2).

(e) "... EC malapportionment effects are commonly overstated." (by?) (p1, par3).

(f) "... malapportionment is often blamed for causing the divergence between popular and EC vote ..." by? (p2, par 3)

If the claim were "common" or stated "often," much less "overstated," I would think the authors could provide an example. I would think they could cite a more specific authority than "common wisdom" or "those who think." In fact, the only time I've seen it claimed is in paragraph one of this paper (c), where the strawman is established by "it would seem there can be little dispute that" the claim is true.

There's a good reason it's never been claimed. It's obviously false. The correlation between population of states/territories and electoral vote is currently 0.9895. If you ignore the territories with 0 electoral votes, especially Puerto Rico with a population of 3 million, the correlation is 0.9992. Who exactly is asserting two variables correlated at 0.999 are not particularly related?

Demonstrations (1) through (4) then reduce to different ways of saying 0.9992 is closer to 1 than people think.

(1) Yep. So?

(2) Yep. So?

(3) Sure. Seems a non sequitur -- Gini of seat allocations is also minuscule compared to, say, Gini of allocations of, I don't know, Seattle Mariners caps -- but sure. So?

(4) OK, that's something I didn't know. But still, so?

The authors do cite literature on other problems of the Electoral College. While most scholarly literature on the Electoral College is negative on the institution, with popular vote reversals one of the ill effects, a far more commonly identified source is the winner-take-all block voting that most states use for their Electoral College vote allocation. Just to drive this home, I did some back of the envelope calculations of the Clinton-Trump portion of Loosemore-Hanby disproportionality under different allocation mechanisms (holding everything equal). "EC actual" is the actual outcome, as recorded with 7 faithless electors. "EC WTA" is the outcome under full winner-take-all by state, with no faithless electors. "EC WTA, no mal" reallocates the electoral seats proportionally across states, with almost no discernible effect on popular vote reversal or Loosemore-Hanby. "EC PR, mal" instead reallocates the existing malapportioned EC seats proportional to state votes, eliminating the popular vote reversal and reducing Loosemore-Hanby to almost 0. "EC PR, no mal" removes malapportionment, again with essentially no discernible effect.

|        |        | Clinton | Trump  |           |                |
|--------|--------|---------|--------|-----------|----------------|
|        |        | 48.2%   | 46.1%  |           |                |
| 0      | 1      | 0.0%    | 100.0% | LH = 0.51 | Votes          |
| 227    | 304    | 42.4%   | 56.5%  | LH = 0.08 | Presidencies   |
| 232    | 306    | 43.1%   | 56.9%  | LH = 0.08 | EC actual      |
| 234.11 | 303.89 | 43.5%   | 56.5%  | LH = 0.08 | EC WTA         |
| 252.54 | 246.93 | 46.9%   | 45.9%  | LH = 0.01 | EC WTA, no mal |
| 260.07 | 248.02 | 48.2%   | 46.1%  | LH = 0.00 | EC PR, mal     |
|        |        |         |        |           | EC PR, no mal  |

So ... I believe malapportionment has almost no impact on the Electoral College. I believe that this is because there is almost no malapportionment in the Electoral College. I believe that this is obvious. The authors have given me no reason to believe anybody has ever argued otherwise.

Reviewer: 2

Comments to the Author

Title: "How Malapportioned is the Electoral College? A Multiple Indicators  
Historical Perspective: 1790-2016."

MS ID: PRQ-2017-0355

I suppose my hunch that the Electoral College (EC) was substantially malapportioned was disconfirmed by this piece. This manuscript provides a detailed accounting of the extent of EC malapportionment relative to other institutions in the

American setting, mainly the U.S. House and U.S. Senate. Contrary to my expectation, the EC is roughly similar to the U.S. House with respect to its degree of malapportionment. This said, it is not actually that surprising that the authors demonstrate this rough equivalence in the malapportionment rate for the U.S. House and the EC since both require some minimal level of representation (1 seat in the House and 3 votes in the EC) and seat/vote allocation is based mainly on population numbers.

Unfortunately, I cannot recommend publication of this piece in Political Research Quarterly (PRQ) because I honestly think it is a very poor fit for this journal. My summary statement of this work is that it amounts to nothing more than an exercise in political arithmetic. Further, the authors simply go through the motions of demonstrating levels of malapportionment with zero discussion of the pertinent political implications of their findings. I suppose if I were Al Gore or Hillary Clinton, this exercise would not hold much value or solace for me. The EC has rendered two counter-majoritarian outcomes in the past 16 years. The authors begin their piece with a nod to the great scholar of democracy, Robert Dahl, and then there is no further discussion of the political significance of EC malapportionment – henceforth it is merely an exercise in arithmetic although admittedly with some interesting findings. Nonetheless, it should be stated that the obvious problem with the EC is that it can (and does) render outcomes contrary to the majoritarian principle and this is something that never happens in district-based U.S. House contests and state-based U.S. Senate races. In other words, despite the evidence that the EC is not as malapportioned as one might think (one in this case, being this reviewer), it still has the serious design flaw of electing presidents who can win with a minority of the popular vote.

I just fail to see why readers of PRQ would have much of an interest in this piece. In fact, I am still trying to think of an outlet that would be a good fit for such an undertaking. Perhaps Electoral Studies?

Reviewer: 3

#### Comments to the Author

In this paper, the authors explore the relative degree of malapportionment of the Electoral College relative to the Senate and the House of Representatives. They find using some measures, the Electoral College is not extremely malapportioned and is not as high as it was previously.

This paper appears to be empirically sound since it just applies data to formula and reports the results. However, it does not do a good job of stating why we should care about the result. I suppose it fits in the literature questioning if we should abolish the Electoral College but it does not engage there all that well. It really does not offer any theory or tests of hypotheses either.

The paper is really footnote heavy and reads somewhat as if it was written for a law review.

If PRQ is fine with reporting a straightforward empirical exercise the paper works. Otherwise I am not sure if it is the right outlet for the paper.

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**Jonathan Robert Cervas** <jcervas@uci.edu>  
To: bgtravel@uci.edu

Sun, Nov 12, 2017 at 5:08 PM

FYI :(

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Jonathan R. Cervas (*Twitter: cervasj*)  
University of California Irvine  
Department of Political Science

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Political Research Quarterly <[onbehalf+prq+okstate.edu@manuscriptcentral.com](mailto:onbehalf+prq+okstate.edu@manuscriptcentral.com)>  
**Date:** November 12, 2017 at 5:00:00 PM PST  
**To:** [jcervas@uci.edu](mailto:jcervas@uci.edu)  
**Subject:** Political Research Quarterly - Decision on Manuscript ID PRQ-2017-0355  
**Reply-To:** [prq@okstate.edu](mailto:prq@okstate.edu)

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**bgtravel** <[bgtravel@uci.edu](mailto:bgtravel@uci.edu)>

Sun, Nov 12, 2017 at 11:18 PM

To: Jonathan Robert Cervas <jcervas@uci.edu>

Well, even though one of the reviewers thought that the EC was malapportioned until he read our article, another thought that no one in his right mind would have thought that. The problems are, (a) with hindsight, that the essay is far too long for the simple point it makes (b) the reviewers didn't appreciate the importance of the claim that using the same standards as are used for redistricting it would be considered malapportioned but using other standards it is not, and (c) and most important of all, we were accused of attacking a straw man, i.e., we had no quotes to rebut. Considering how much negative stuff has been said about the EC, somewhere there must be folks who say it is malapportioned and we need to find them!!

//Bernie

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