

# Collegiate Case Study

# USA TODAY

NO. 1 IN THE USA



## Inside:

No state too small to be factor in electoral math

By Richard Benedetto

### Comparing Kan., Mo. campaigns

	Kansas	Missouri
Electoral votes	6	11
Presidential candidate visits since clinching party nominations in mid-March		
Bush	1	14
Gore	1	13
Estimated spending on TV ads aimed at the state's voters since the national conventions in mid-August through Tuesday		
Bush and RNC	\$0 <sup>1</sup>	\$5.9 million
Gore and DNC	\$0 <sup>1</sup>	\$5.5 million
1998 Election Day turnout of voting-age population	39%	39%
Latest statewide poll	Bush 55% Gore 32%	Bush 44% Gore 46%
Presidential election history	Voted Republican in every presidential election since 1964	Voted for the winner in every presidential election in the 20th century except 1956

1 - Ads intended to persuade Missouri voters that are broadcast on stations near the state border also are seen by Kansas residents.  
Source: The Almanac of American Politics: Hotline; Bush and Gore campaigns, Kansas poll by American Research Group Sept. 12-Sept. 15; margin of error +/- 4 percentage points. Missouri poll by St. Louis Post-Dispatch/KMOV Tuesday-Wednesday, margin of error +/- 4 percentage points.

## Case Study Expert: Ross Baker

Political Science Professor  
Rutgers University

### USA TODAY Snapshots®

#### States with the highest percentage of voter turnout

Maine	72%
Minnesota	64%
Montana	62%
South Dakota	61%
Wyoming	59%

Note: Figures based on voting-age population.

Source: Federal Election Commission

By April Umminger and Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

## Electoral Politics

**Summary:** The freedom to vote for a candidate of your choice is a privilege not everyone in the world enjoys. The presidential election — an essential part of that freedom — generates election strategies, controversy and critical analysis of the results. This case study offers the opportunity to learn from history and debate the future.



### Cover story

## Some states just matter more

Almost half the states are shunned by presidential candidates because their voters are so predictable.  
(Sorry, Kansas)

By Susan Page  
USA TODAY

Pittsburg, Kan. — In presidential politics, not all states are created equal.

When loyal Republicans here besiege Crawford County GOP Chairwoman Jane Nance for Bush-Cheney yard signs to show their support, she has to deliver a tough message: The signs and stakes are needed for lawns in other, more critical states.

"I'd like to have a million of them," Nance groans, instead of the handful she has been able to get.

A few miles across the Kansas-Missouri border, Pat Palmer, the Jasper County GOP headquarters coordinator in Joplin, Mo., already has distributed 100 yard signs and has no problem ordering 150 more.

Why the difference? Blame it on the

Electoral College, the peculiar American institution that dictates that voters don't choose their president directly. Instead, they select electors who cast the state's votes, generally giving all of them to the candidate who carries the state, even if the margin of victory over an opponent is narrow.

As a result, states that are reliably Republican, such as Kansas, or reliably Democratic, such as Massachusetts, end up being taken for granted in the presidential campaign. TV ads, candidate visits and strategists' attention are lavished instead on battleground states that swing from one party to the other, such as Missouri.

The bottom line: Much of the South, the Mountain West and the Plains plus parts of New England end up being virtually ignored during presidential campaigns. Hawaii and Alaska also typically are neglected because of their

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politics — Hawaii generally votes Democratic, Alaska Republican — and their geography.

In all, 89 million Americans — nearly one-third of the population — live in 24 states, plus the District of Columbia, that have seen few TV ads and gotten little attention in the presidential campaign. Those voters, especially those who don't support the dominant party in their state, sometimes feel disenfranchised.

"I hate the Electoral College — it's a big rip," says Judith Mynatt, 58, who has stopped by Harry's Café for a cup of coffee with a friend before their shift at the Pitt Plastics plant outside this Kansas town of 18,500 souls. "With the communications we have now, there's no reason why they couldn't count all our votes. It's outdated."

"That's one of the reasons people like me don't vote," says co-worker Gay Forth, 49.

They and others call the Electoral College an anachronism, created to ensure an informed choice in an age when transportation and communications were difficult or impossible across a new country.

### A president's mandate

What's more, this fall's close contest between Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore raises the possibility — admittedly slim — that for the first time since 1888, one candidate could carry the popular vote but the other win a majority in the Electoral College.

It's arithmetically possible that the Texas governor could win the popular vote by carrying Republican states in the South and Mountain West by wide margins while the vice president wins enough larger tossup states narrowly to claim the Electoral College.

It's also possible that Gore could win the popular vote but lose the Electoral College if Green Party candidate Ralph Nader draws enough votes in some Democratic states to tip their electoral votes to Bush.

If that were to happen, "the new president's mandate would be lost or muddied," says James Thurber, director of the Center for Presidential and Congressional Studies at

American University in Washington.

"That would be devastating," agrees John Hibbing, a political scientist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. It would deny the new president a sense of legitimacy and seem manifestly unjust to the majority of voters who had supported the other candidate.



Photos by Mike Gullet for USA TODAY  
**Political table talk:** Republican Charles McCloud, left, and Democrat Leroy Younger, front right, at Harry's Café in Pittsburg, Kan., with their coffee group. They agree on one political issue: Americans would be upset if one candidate won the popular vote and the other won in the Electoral College.

If anything, the country has been moving toward more direct democracy. Candidates increasingly use polls to shape their positions on issues. There has been a profusion of referendums on state ballots, as voters not

only elect representatives but also direct public policy on issues from taxes to affirmative action.

The Electoral College has few defenders at Harry's Café, where morning diners complain that they feel forgotten, that their votes don't really matter.

"The Republicans got it sewn up in Kansas — that's just the way it's always been," says Frank Rodich, 66, a retired insurance agent and Democrat.

"We're going to vote, and vote the way we're going to vote, anyway," shrugs Charles McCloud, 70, a Republican and retired lineman for Kansas Gas & Electric. He is sitting at a back table with a half-dozen other retired men, a group that has been meeting over coffee on Tuesday mornings for a decade.

Maybe so, says Leroy Younger, 66, a Democrat and McCloud's weekly political nemesis. But if one candidate won the Electoral College while his opponent received a majority of the popular vote, he says, "there sure would be a lot of people upset." On that, Younger and McCloud agree.

The debate over how to choose the president was the longest-running dispute at the Constitutional Convention of 1787, says Judith Best, a professor at the State University of New York-Cortland and author of *The Choice of the People?: Debating the Electoral College*. The Founding Fathers wanted an "energetic" president independent of the legislative branch — unlike a parliamentary system — but they worried that voters wouldn't be informed enough to choose a national leader.

# Electoral Politics Case Study

A form of indirect popular election was devised: Voters would select wise men from each state whose sole role would be to choose the president.

However, the 18th-century question about whether voters can know enough about a candidate to choose surely has been answered in a 21st-century era of instantaneous communications, nationally televised debates and saturation news coverage.

Rep. Ray LaHood, R-Ill., calls the current system undemocratic. He has submitted a constitutional amendment to elect a president by popular vote, but he acknowledges, "I have no illusions that this is going to happen anytime soon."

Proposals to change to a popular-vote system have languished. The idea gained momentum briefly after the tumultuous campaign in 1968, when independent candidate George Wallace threatened to throw the election into the House of Representatives. Wallace won five Southern states and 46 electoral votes — not enough, as it turned out, to deny Richard Nixon a majority in the Electoral College against Hubert Humphrey. A resolution to change the system passed the House in 1969, but it never came to a Senate vote.

If the popular vote doesn't prevail this year, however, congressional hearings surely will follow amid a new public outcry to amend the Constitution. "And I think it would spell the end of the Electoral College," Hibbing says.

## Electoral College pluses

Some experts warn of troubling political repercussions that would follow if the Electoral College were abandoned, even if the reasoning that created it seems outdated.

The system has the effect of empowering smaller states and individual voter groups, they say. And it has an impact unimagined by the men who created it: It reduces the power of paid TV ads.

If the president were elected by popular vote, Kansas probably still wouldn't have enough voters to command much attention — but neither would Missouri.

"We get a substantial level of presidential and vice-presidential candidate attention that we wouldn't otherwise get," says Rep. Roy Blunt, who represents the district that includes Joplin and is Bush's liaison to House Republicans.

"The substantial battle for (Missouri's swing) voters probably wouldn't be worth the effort" in a direct national election, he says.

"Missouri would get less attention than it does today," agrees Tad Devine, a top Gore strategist. "We'd probably redirect our advertising to larger media markets like New York and Los Angeles in an effort to persuade the most voters.

Instead of states, we'd think in terms of media markets."

Without an Electoral College, the campaign would be reduced to "media and tarmacs," TV ads and airport rallies, says Curtis Gans, director of the non-partisan Committee for the Study of the American Electorate in Washington.

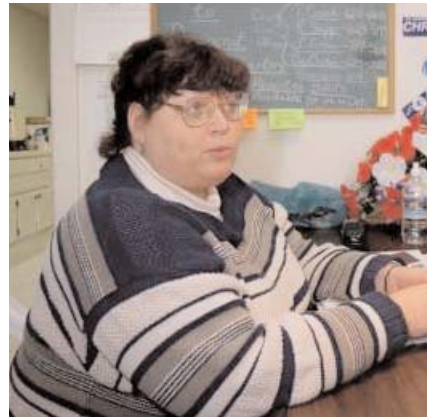
In contrast, under the current system, candidates must forge coalitions of voters within states. Even relatively small groups of voters — Hispanics in California, Jews in New Jersey and Cuban-Americans in Florida — can command attention if they're clustered in a large, competitive state. To win, a candidate almost always has to build grassroots support in every region of the country and carry the vote in rural states and industrialized ones, big cities and suburbs.

If the popular vote were all that mattered, Best says, "then one candidate could try to run up the vote in the populous Eastern megalopolis, or in a narrow strip along the East Coast and the West Coast, and to hell with the rest of the country."

## Joplin's grass roots

Consider both campaign headquarters now humming in downtown Joplin on behalf of the two major parties.

At Republican headquarters, volunteers have been staffing a bank of six phones each evening over the last two weeks of the campaign.



**Fisher:** Working in Democratic Headquarters in Joplin, Mo.

At Democratic headquarters, Judy Fisher, the vice chair of the county's party organization, is overseeing the preparation of packets of campaign literature that are to be distributed to more than 1,200 targeted households in the county.

Missouri is a classic swing state and the nation's top bellwether. It went with the winner in every presidential election in the 20th century except 1956, when the Show Me State voted for Adlai Stevenson but the country elected Dwight Eisenhower.

In contrast, Kansas has voted Republican in the past eight elections.

Surprisingly, being ignored doesn't seem to be decisive in whether eligible voters go to the polls, according to Gans. Kansas' turnout rate tends to be the same as or slightly higher



than Missouri's, for instance.

Voter participation is more likely to be determined by age, education and attitude.

"I don't think anybody really thinks about the Electoral College," says Ed Stratton, 48, co-owner of S & S Heating & Air in Joplin.

At the Fourth Street Bowl, R.B. Nichols, 73, is playing with his 3-year-old great-grandson, Kyle, before his weekly bowling league game begins.

"Wouldn't make any difference where you live, a person should still vote," he declares, saying he never fails to go the polls.

His reasoning: "If you don't vote, you don't have any room to gripe."

### States that seem to have been forgotten

The presidential candidates have spent little or not money for TV ads in half of the 50 states, although voters in these states might see some ads on stations that broadcast to more than one state. Most of these states get little attention because they are considered either reliably Republican or Democrat.

State	Electoral votes	Presidential voting history
Alabama	9	Republican in every election since 1976
Alaska	3	Republican in every election since 1964
Arizona	8	Republican in every election since 1948 except 1996
Colorado	8	Republican in every election since 1964 except 1992
Connecticut	8	Republican in 1972 through 1988; Democratic in 1992 and 1996
District of Columbia	3	Democratic in every election since gaining electoral votes in 1964
Hawaii	4	Democratic in every election since 1972 except 1984
Idaho	4	Republican in every election since 1964
Kansas	6	Republican in every election since 1964
Maryland	10	Democratic in seven of the past 10 elections
Massachusetts	12	Democratic in eight of the past 10 elections
Mississippi	7	Republican in every election since 1976
Montana	3	Republican in every election since 1964 except 1992
Nebraska	5	Republican in every election since 1964
New York	33	Democratic in every election since 1984
North Dakota	3	Republican in every election since 1964
Oklahoma	8	Republican in every election since 1964
Rhode Island	4	Democratic in every election since 1984
South Carolina	8	Republican in every election since 1976
South Dakota	3	Republican in every election since 1964
Texas	32	Republican in every election since 1976
Utah	5	Republican in every election since 1964
Vermont	3	Republican from 1968 through 1988; Democratic in 1992 and 1996
Virginia	13	Republican in every election since 1964
Wyoming	3	Republican in every election since 1964

Note: No presidential TV ads have been bought in New Jersey because there are no commercial TV stations in the state. But New Jersey is considered a swing state that receives considerable attention during the campaign. Voters there see ads on Philadelphia stations.

Source: University of Wisconsin/Brennan Center for Justice of New York University School of Law; Bush and Gore campaigns.

Contributing: Richard Benedetto

# Electoral Politics Case Study

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2000, 07A

## Politics

# No state too small to be factor in electoral math

## Candidates spend time, money to battle for every four or five votes

By Richard Benedetto  
USA TODAY

A few "small" states, rarely battlegrounds in presidential elections, have taken on new importance this year as a close race magnifies their value in the contest for 270 Electoral College votes.

George W. Bush and Al Gore are spending precious time in a half-dozen states that candidates had abandoned by this point in previous campaigns. The states are rated as tossups based on opinion polls.

\* Democratic nominee Gore campaigned heavily in Maine and New Hampshire last week as those states, which have four electoral votes each, remain up for grabs.

\* Republican Bush was in New Mexico on Friday, trying to add its five votes to his column. On Monday, he began his week in Arkansas, home of President Clinton and six electoral votes. Earlier, he was in Maine.

If Bush can carry Arkansas, Maine and New Mexico, that would give him 15 electoral votes, which would offset the loss of a larger state, such as Missouri, which has 11 votes, or Tennessee, also with 11.

Running mates, too, have been in and out of small tossup states on days when the ticket leaders are focusing on the bigger electoral prizes -- states such as Illinois, Ohio, California and Pennsylvania:

\* Democratic vice-presidential candidate Joe Lieberman was in New Mexico on Monday and in Arkansas last

weekend.

\* His Republican counterpart, Dick Cheney, spent Monday in Oregon, which has seven electoral votes, and Washington state, which has 11.

"The fact that they have come here at all makes it more than what presidential candidates usually do," says Sandy Maisel, government professor at Colby College in Maine.

At the same time, the two sides have been blanketing small states with radio and TV ads in media markets that are relatively cheap to saturate.

"You get a real bang for your buck here," Maisel says. He notes that ads in Maine also penetrate the New Hampshire market and vice versa.

Andrew Smith, a University of New Hampshire political scientist, says he expects Bush to use Arizona Sen. John McCain in TV ads in New Hampshire, where McCain beat Bush in the Republican primary in February. "McCain has a lot of support with independents here," Smith says.

Not all small states are getting candidate attention. Vermont, Rhode Island, Maryland and Connecticut appear to be safely counted in the Gore column and have been largely ignored by both campaigns.

Kansas, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, Alabama and South Carolina are Bush strongholds and similarly would offer little payoff for a candidate visit.

Polls show Iowa, still considered a tossup, might be leaning toward Gore. Neither side has indicated any plans to campaign there. Delaware last week moved from the tossup category to Gore. Earlier, Cheney and Lieberman visited there. So did Lieberman's wife, Hadassah.

Maine, however, is very much in play. It has long been considered a bellwether state. "As Maine goes, so goes the nation" is an old political axiom.

Gore was in Maine last Wednesday to press his education proposals in an effort to woo middle-class independents and women who consider improving school quality a top priority. He did the same thing Thursday in New Hampshire.

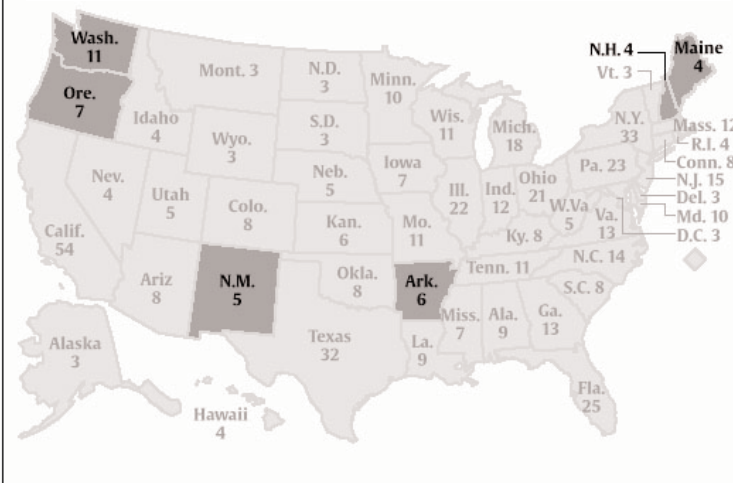
Bush made a middle-class-family pitch to the same types of voters in Arkansas with his plan to double the child tax credit from \$500 per child to \$1,000.

Bush, whose family has a vacation home in Kennebunkport, is hoping that his connection to Maine will help him there. Cheney was in Portland in early September, talking about military readiness in a region where government shipbuilding is an important source of jobs. Bush was there just before Labor Day.

In New Mexico, former Oklahoma senator Fred Harris, a Democrat who is a political science professor at the

## 'Small' states getting attention

In a close presidential race, every electoral vote could be important. So Vice President Gore and Texas Gov. George W. Bush are spending time in states with very few electoral votes. The candidates and their running mates are campaigning in "small" states that polls show are tossups: Washington, Oregon, New Mexico, Arkansas, New Hampshire and Maine.



Source: USA TODAY research

By Frank Pompa, USA TODAY

University of New Mexico, says the state's large Hispanic vote keeps it from being a lock for Republicans, as some Western states are.

Bush was there Friday. Gore has visited twice. Clinton, who won there in 1992 and 1996, will visit Monday. Tipper Gore is expected in New Mexico soon.

David Salazar, 35, of Albuquerque shook Lieberman's hand at the New Mexico State Fair on Monday.

"It's good they understand we're a part of the U.S.," he says. "Every electoral vote is going to be important. It's going to be a tight race."

Contributing: Judy Keen in Little Rock and Andrea Stone in Albuquerque

# Electoral Politics Case Study

## Behind the Story: A Reporter's Notebook



Susan Page  
White House reporter  
USA TODAY

I grew up in Kansas, so I had a lifetime head start on this story. Just about the only time we saw a presidential candidate was when Bob Dole would come home to Russell to announce his campaign. As a reporter who has covered every presidential campaign since 1980, I found myself repeatedly returning the same dozen states. Why do some states get all the attention? That's the question I set out to answer.

My conclusion: Blame (or credit) our peculiar Electoral College system. What matters most is the swing potential of a state. Is it so reliably Republican or Democratic that the outcome isn't really in doubt? If so, voters in those states are likely to see the candidates only on the network news. (The other effect of the Electoral College system is the possibility that a candidate will win the presidency while losing the popular vote. As we found out later, that happened in the 2000 election for the first time in more than a century.)

I wanted to go to adjoining states that were treated in very different ways by the campaigns. Kansas and Missouri seemed to be the perfect pair. Kansas is reliably Republican. But Missouri has eclipsed Delaware as the nation's top election bellwether, swinging to the winner in every presidential election since 1956. I spent several days in the area, driving back and forth from Pittsburg, Kan., to Joplin, Mo. Nice folks on both sides of the border, of course. But while Joplin had bustling local headquarters for Al Gore and George Bush, the county GOP chairman on the Kansas side couldn't even get Bush-Cheney lawn signs.

Susan Page is the Washington bureau chief for USA Today. She also appears each week on the journalists' roundtable for CNN's Sunday morning interview program, "Late Edition" and regularly guest-hosts "The Diane Rehm Show," a daily two-hour interview/call-in show on WAMU and National Public Radio. She has won national awards for her reporting, including the Gerald R. Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on the Presidency, the Merriman Smith Memorial Award for Deadline Reporting on the Presidency and the Sigma Delta Chi Award for Washington Correspondence (shared).

Susan has covered six presidential elections and four White House administrations. She's interviewed the past seven presidents - three while they were in office -- as well as seven of the men they defeated for that job. She joined USA Today as White House correspondent in 1995 after covering the White House and national politics for Newsday. She is the immediate past president of the White House Correspondents' Association (for 1999-2000), a member of the board of the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards, a past member of the board of the Washington Press Club Foundation and a member of the Gridiron Club, a 117-year-old organization of 60 Washington journalists.

A native of Wichita, Kansas, Page received a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University, where she was editor-in-chief of the Daily Northwestern. She received a master's degree from Columbia University, where she was a Pulitzer Fellow.

## Additional resources

[electionmethods.org](http://electionmethods.org)

[www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)

[www.democrats.org](http://www.democrats.org)

[www.rnc.org](http://www.rnc.org)

[www.issues2000.org](http://www.issues2000.org)

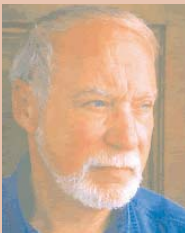
## For discussion

1. People in many states complain about being ignored by presidential campaigns because one party or the other is so powerful in their state that the other party doesn't bother to compete seriously and simply concedes that state's electoral votes. If the electoral college system were changed in favor of direct election of the president by popular vote would Americans in all parts of the country be guaranteed equal treatment by the presidential campaigns?
2. Strong Republican states like Kansas and Nebraska and strong Democratic states such as Massachusetts and Vermont received little attention from either presidential campaign in the 2000 election. Does this mean that such states that are now considered easy wins for one party or the other will always be bypassed by candidates in future presidential elections?
3. Critics of the electoral college system call for its abolition as antiquated and undemocratic. Defenders of the college stress such features as the added influence it gives to small states which might otherwise be ignored by the campaigns. Bearing in mind that states are not constitutionally obligated to award all of their electoral votes to the winner of their statewide popular vote (the so-called winner-take-all system), does the approach used in Maine and Nebraska of giving one electoral vote to the winner in each congressional district and two electoral votes to the candidate who wins statewide a sensible compromise?

## Future Implications:

In a typical presidential election only about 50% of those who are eligible to vote actually go to the polls. In congressional elections, the percentage is only about one-third. Yet, at the same time, the participation of wealthy and powerful individuals in the form of campaign contributions to candidates and parties has increased enormously. What questions does this fact raise about the relationship between American politics in principle and American politics in practice?

## About Professor Ross Baker



Ross K. Baker is Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. He spent three years on Capitol Hill as a speech-writer for three senators in the 1970s, as a consultant to the Democratic Caucus of the House of Representatives in the 1980s and as aides to Republican Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska and Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont in 2001. He is author of *Friend and Foe in the U.S. Senate and House and Senate*, and is a regular contributor to the *Los Angeles Times* and *Newsday*.