ABSTRACT

The Statistics of Swing: The Demographics and Political Properties of U.S. Presidential Swing States

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Presidential swing states, particularly the demographic and political features that predict them, have been under-researched in the field of political science. This thesis examines what features might predict swing states in U.S. presidential elections. After conducting a literature review and determining what the best measure of a swing state is, ten hypotheses are proposed and tested using regression models. The statistical results indicate that states with a high number of middle class households, a lack of religious adherents, and a low electoral vote per capita count are more likely to be swing states. This is substantial because it can help guide political scientists, pollsters, and political campaigns in future elections when deciding what states should deserve the most attention.

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THE STATISTICS OF SWING: THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF AND POLITICAL PROPERTIES OF U.S. PRESIDENTIAL SWING STATES

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The United States has an extremely unique system for presidential elections which is rooted in the Electoral College. The nature of this system is such that states are "winner take all" in terms of electoral votes for whichever candidate can garner the most votes in that state. Due to this unique structure, certain states rise to eminence each presidential election cycle due to their volatile nature. These states are commonly referred to as swing states, or battleground states. Winning even a couple of these highly sought-after states can be the difference between victory and defeat in an election that determines the leader of the United States, also deemed the leader of the free world. Thus, the importance of these states is readily apparent.

However, even though these states are at the heart of American presidential politics, there has been little research conducted on what features predict whether or not a state will be a swing state, or the "elasticity" of a state. Why is it that Iowa is often considered a swing state when all the states that border it, except perhaps Wisconsin, are not considered presidential swing states? As a native Iowan deeply interested in presidential politics, this is a question I have often pondered but have never found a compelling answer. Thus, my thesis is to undertake this significant question and attempt to provide some possible explanations and predictors of United States presidential swing states. I believe that through testing a number of demographic and political properties of each U.S. state, I will be able to expand upon this limited research base and begin to

understand the answers to a question that is of vital importance to political scientists, pollsters, and politicians.

In Chapter Two, I will enter into a detailed literature review of the limited amount of research conducted on what features predict a state's swing state status. I will look at many possible factors as outlined by different political scientists and theorists.

Next, I will take a step back and define a swing state as I see fit for this thesis in Chapter Three. This is important because the term "swing state" is often a buzzword thrown around without exact definition. I will offer up the four methods of measurement I believe to be worth discussing, two of which I will utilize as dependent variables.

Following my discussion of the dependent variable, I will enter into a discussion of my hypotheses and data in Chapter Four. There are ten hypotheses I believe worth testing, eight of which I will be able to test due to the available data. I will list my hypotheses and give my reasoning behind them and then explain where my data for each has been retrieved and how it will be used.

In Chapter Five, I will discuss the results of the statistical analyses I will conduct on my data. I will identify which hypotheses can be proven, which can be disproven, and which lack the statistical significance to reject the null hypothesis. My data sets for my regression analyses will also be present in this chapter, readily accessible to the reader.

Finally, Chapter Six will take my statistical results and give them some theoretical backing and conclude the thesis. I will explain which results I believe are worth taking note of and which deserve to be extended and further tested in future research before giving brief closing remarks.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Surprisingly, little analysis has been conducted concerning my research question of why swing states are in fact swing states. I will evaluate what research there is on this topic throughout this chapter. Before beginning, it is important to distinguish the difference between the questions of *what* a swing state is and *why* a swing state is a swing state. While the question of *what* a swing state is will be essential in order to help set acceptable parameters for testing, it doesn't answer the heart of my research question. Understanding that Florida and Ohio in recent elections have been swing states makes me able to test for factors that define those states as swing states, but does not in and of itself answer *why* those states are swing states. Nevertheless, determining an acceptable method for evaluating how "swingy," or elastic, a state is will be important to discuss in Chapter Three. This chapter, however, will focus exclusively on why a state is or is not a swing state using what little research there is on the subject. Due to the limited amount of material covering this topic (which is part of why this research question is important), I will use some less traditional academic sources throughout my work, such as the politics and data website FiveThirtyEight.

When discussing why swing states do or do not exist and why they might emerge or disappear, most political scientists have attempted to list possible explanations or disprove other explanations. Abramowitz et al. tried to eliminate one common theory as to why certain states have become uncompetitive in national, as well as local, elections.

They contest that redistricting is not the reason for uncompetitive elections in certain states. Using California as an example, they indicate that "[t]here is little evidence that redistricting generally makes elections less competitive" (Abramowitz et al. 2006, 88). This is primarily because redistricting generally removes "the safety margins of incumbents by moving reliable partisans out of the district" (Abramowitz et al. 2006, 88). In the long term, this process can actually make elections more competitive by allowing competition for once unclaimable incumbent seats. The question then becomes, what is to blame for uncompetitive elections in a state such as California, which used to be a swing state but is now a Democratic stronghold? Abramowitz et al. believe that recent trends in people with similar ideological beliefs living closer together has caused a decline in competitive presidential elections in states like California. They argue that while California "was once a swing state in national politics," it no longer is because "Americans are increasingly living in communities and neighborhoods whose residents share their values" (Abramowitz et al. 2006, 88).

Thus, they argue that blue counties tend to clump together in urban centers while red counties get pushed into more rural areas. Essentially, this process makes red counties "redder" and blue counties "bluer" (Abramowitz et al. 2006, 88). This manifests itself in national elections as well, making swing states that leaned Democratic become firmly Democratic while swing states that leaned Republican have become firmly Republican (as can be seen in southern states). As such, one factor that will clearly have to be tested for is geographical polarization, or "sorting" as Abramowitz et al. call it (Abramowitz et al. 2006, 88).

Conversely, Ruy Teixeira attempted to list possible factors as to why presidential elections in the Mountain West have become more competitive in recent years. He and his colleagues found a multitude of possible explanations for this shift. First, they evaluated the geography and demography of the region. They found that "[a]cross the region, minorities and white college graduates are gaining while the white working class is declining rapidly" (Teixeira 2012, 5). Thus, these states that have traditionally voted Republican are developing more and more traditionally Democratic citizen shares. Demographic shifts seem to be a likely explanation for shifting swing state statuses and will be tested for within this examination.

A second possible explanation laid out by Teixeira's colleagues is that metropolitan shifts towards the Democratic Party have changed the Mountain West into a swing region. Teixeira notes that "the Mountain West is among the most urbanized areas in the United States" and "there was a consistent trend toward voting Democratic over the last decade in these metro areas" (Teixeira 2012, 5). Thus, the shifting voter preference of metro areas, along with the large amount of them in the Mountain West, could be the driving factor behind the region's swing status. Indeed, the trend in American politics for metropolitan areas to hold strong voting power has been recognized for decades, with Eldersveld stating that "[t]he metropolitan vote may well have become the balance-wheel in our political system" (Eldersveld 1949, 1206). Both Teixeira's theory and Abramowitz's theory would seem to support this prediction, with Abramowitz's belief that geographical sorting of partisans in metropolitan areas is what caused California to become uncompetitive. However, here the grouping of like-minded partisans in metro areas has moved these states from easy Republican wins to potential toss ups. It's clear

that both authors believe this effect results in states becoming more blue. Urban density and shifting metropolitan demographics will accordingly have to be accounted for in my analysis.

A third explanation given by Teixeira is the effect that Hispanic voters have had on Mountain West elections. Indeed, Hispanics are by far the fastest growing demographic share in the Mountain West, helping to deliver multiple key states to Obama in 2008 (Teixeira 2012, 6). However, the effect of this growing population is dampened some by a "translation gap" (Teixeira 2012, 6). Essentially, there are less eligible Hispanic voters than white voters with 77 of 100 whites eligible to vote in national elections, while only "42 of 100 Hispanics are eligible" (Teixeira 2012, 6). Thus, Hispanic populations must grow a lot quicker than white populations in order to cause major effects in national elections. However, as the first explanation shows, this trend is happening in the Mountain West and, therefore, Hispanic voters could be a cause of the region's changing status. Frey takes this a step further, arguing that minorities, specifically Hispanics, were a major influence in the 2008 election and would likely also be a major influence in the 2012 election (Frey 2012). Frey acknowledges the translation gap, but believes this was rendered somewhat irrelevant by the enthusiasm minority voters had for then Senator Obama in the 2008 election. He argues that "in most but not all states" minority enthusiasm led to an uptick in Democratic voter turnout (Frey 2012). So, while it is unclear whether or not minority enthusiasm will remain in upcoming elections, it is clear that increasing minority population size and turnout could change the swing status of some states and warrants investigation.

Teixeira's fourth explanation of the Mountain West's shifting national voting pattern is the rising Millennial generation in the region. As is to be expected, "Mountain West Millennials are more politically liberal than older generations" (Teixeira 2012, 7). However, oddly enough, Mountain West Millennials differ from Millennials outside of the region on "party affiliation and voting behavior" (Teixeira 2012, 7). Even though Mountain West Millennials hold similar liberal beliefs to Millennials of other regions, they still vote Republican at much higher rates. This strange balancing act done by the rising Millennial generation in the Mountain West could help explain why the region has become more of a swing bloc while not shifting heavily left. Accordingly, age demographics will need to be accounted for in my overall evaluation of the causes behind swing states.

A fifth possible explanation for the shifting voting preferences of the Mountain West, as discussed by Teixeira, is the beliefs many residents in the region hold. Mountain West residents seem to hold a "libertarian bent" on issues of gun rights and federal government power (Teixeira 2012, 8). However, their beliefs on environmental issues, renewable energy, public education, and crime all trend more Democratic. Thus, this balance of Republican and Democratic beliefs could become evident in the area, explaining why it is becoming more of a swing region. Hillygus and Shields emphasize that "the most persuadable voters in the electorate—those voters most likely to be responsive to campaign information—are partisans who disagree with their party on a policy issue they care about" (Hillygus & Shields 2014, 2). The inherent contradictions Teixeira found in voters' beliefs in the Mountain West could be causing large sections of the population to act as this group of most persuadable voters, creating the condition for a

swing state region. Thus, preferences on different partisan issues will likely also need to be evaluated in my analysis.

Finally, Teixeira believes that redistricting does have an effect on the voting tendencies of the region, in contrast to Abramowitz et al.'s belief that it has little effect. Essentially, Teixeira believes that reapportionment and redistricting have a magnifying effect on the other changes occurring in the Mountain West. Indeed, he believes "their outcomes are being shaped by ongoing processes of rapid demographic and geographic change" (Teixeira 2012, 2). Clearly, redistricting is a factor that will need to be tested in order to prove or disprove its effect on presidential elections.

Glaeser and Ward propose yet another possible explanation for the partisan makeup of states. They believe that the American political parties have begun to divide themselves along religious and cultural lines as opposed to economic lines. They argue these divisions are becoming more common because religious groups provide a way for politicians to send messages to excite a targeted base (Glaser & Ward 2005, 120). Unsurprisingly, states that have large religious populations would seem ripe for swing state status.

David Strömberg suggests a different process by which swing states maintain their status. He argues that swing states receive by far the most attention in presidential elections from the candidates. Strömberg points out that "three of every five candidate visits in 2004 were in Florida, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Pennsylvania" (Strömberg 2008, 769). For other non-swing states, this means that their electorate has "weaker incentives to be informed and to vote" (Strömberg 2008, 769). Thus, there are a couple variables presented by Strömberg's work that deserve testing. The first is whether or not

campaign visits, or campaign efforts as a whole, maintain the swing state status of states or if other features such as demographics can override these efforts. Second, the incentive to vote could keep states as either swing states or non-swing states. Strömberg measures this variable as "voting power" which is "the probability that a vote is decisive in an election" (Strömberg 2008, 771). Strömberg points out that this probability is directly affected by the electoral votes allocated to a state relative to its population size. Therefore, separate from voting power, electoral votes relative to population size is a factor worth testing.

Having conducted this literature review, there are a few key factors that I will measure as independent variables moving forward. Redistricting and partisan sorting were discussed above as possible political/geographic factors influencing the elasticity of states. In a more demographic/geographic sense, the urban vs. rural citizen divide will be measured as another possible factor affecting elasticity. Purely demographic features were also analyzed above and will be tested. These include relative numbers of nonwhite citizens, young citizens, and religious citizens. The issue preferences of citizens, particularly a divide which favors some liberal and some conservative positions, will also be measured. Finally, political factors such as "voting power," measured as electoral votes per capita, and campaign visits will be included in my research analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

Measuring Swing

The heart of this research project is to determine what factors affect the swing status of a state. However, in order to measure this in a way that provides meaningful results, it is essential to determine what form of definition and measurement will be used in determining if and when a state is a swing state or not. Essentially, a way in which to measure how "swingy" a state is will need to be determined.

Here, it is important to note that the term "swing state" is often used in two different ways by popular media. The first definition is a state "in which voters alternatively support Democrats and Republicans" (Murse). This definition is also commonly referred to as a "Battleground State" although I will be using swing state primarily throughout. The second definition of a swing state is a state which has the power to "swing" an election, "tipping the balance" of the given presidential election (Murse). States like Ohio and Florida would generally fall into this category, but would also fall into the first definition since they have a high chance of alternating support. For the purposes of this research, I am interested in the first definition. I am more curious as to why states "swing" back and forth in support of the two parties than whether or not that swing will have a substantial effect on the election. That being said, many of the states I will be researching do have substantial effects on elections and thus make this an important area of research.

There are multiple ways in which one could measure how "swingy," or elastic, a state could be. First, one could examine the makeup of senators and representatives from a given state. A state that has a near even split of Republican and Democratic senators and representatives would seem to be swingy, while a state that is lopsided one way or the other would seem to not be. This method would provide multiple advantages. While any method tied to presidential elections would be restricted to one election every four years, this method could be used to analyze multiple elections every two years, granting a more reflexive analysis. Additionally, this method could be useful in examining what portions of a state seem to go red and what portions tend to go blue.

Yet, there are faults with this method of analysis. For one, this research is intended to study swing states in the context of presidential elections. While presidential elections and congressional elections may be linked in some ways, they are not inherently the same. Smaller turnouts for midterm elections as, opposed to presidential elections, along with less publicity in congressional races, are just two of many factors that can make the two dissimilar. Thus, while a potentially useful measure, it seems this would be a poor measure to rely on for this thesis.

The next possible way of measuring the elasticity of a state would be by examining how close the presidential elections have been in the given state. This could easily be measured by looking up vote counts in each presidential election for each state. This measure would be beneficial since it is directly tied to presidential elections. Additionally, vote counts would be able to accurately demonstrate just how elastic a state is since more precise numbers are available than some of the other methods.

There are again drawbacks to this method of measurement, however. First, this method may find that states are "swingy" even if they have not actually swung over the time period analyzed. For example, a state could consistently just barely vote Republican but never actually vote Democrat. This method would still give that state a high elasticity rating even though it has never actually swung. Additionally, this measure would have an extremely limited sample size given that presidential elections only occur every four years. Nevertheless, this dependent variable seems to get close to the heart of the issue and will be one of the variables used for testing. I will refer to this dependent variable as the "closeness" of a state.

A third method of measuring the elasticity of a state would be by simply counting the number of times it has swung from Republican to Democrat or vice versa over a given period of time. This method would seem to be the most directly tied to my area of inquiry and would accurately show whether or not a state has swung back and forth repeatedly in presidential elections.

This method of analysis does have some faults as well. First, it falls prey to the same issue as the previous method where there is a small sample size because of how infrequently presidential elections occur. Additionally, the samples would seem to have less precision since the options are binary as opposed to voting numbers which have far more possible outcomes for differentiating the elasticity of states. Essentially, two states that both voted Republican every election over a given period would both have the same measure of elasticity, even if one state was by a margin of a few hundred votes each election and the other was by tens of thousands. Nevertheless, this seems like an important measure to take into account because of how closely it measures the intent of

this experiment. Accordingly, this will also be a dependent variable I used in my testing. This variable will be labeled throughout as "swings."

FiveThirtyEight uses another model for determining the elasticity of different states. They calculate the elasticity of a state based on "individual level voting records from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study" as well as using "state-by-state exit polls" (Silver 2016). This is a unique approach because it is far less concerned with the overall outcomes of previous elections than the other suggested models. Instead, this model looks at the likelihood that individuals within each state will be swayed by national trends. For example, Nate Silver claims that "New Hampshire is more 'swingy,' because it has a relatively homogenous set of moderate, middle-income white voters," while Mississippi is less elastic because "its vote is bifurcated between highly conservative whites and reliably Democratic African-Americans" (Silver 2016). Accordingly, this model would seem to work well in determining how many swing voters exist in each state and thus determine whether or not that state is itself a swing state.

However, there are a number of issues with this model if it were to be applied for my purposes. First, this measure of elasticity is less concerned with determining if and why a state is a swing state, but instead determining how to apply national polls to different states. As Nate Silver says:

> Suppose polls-plus assumes that polls will move slightly toward Trump by Election Day — for instance, that he'll go from trailing Clinton by 7 percentage points nationally to trailing her by 4 percentage points. Does that mean polls-plus just adds 3 points to Trump in every state? Not quite. Some states are more elastic or "swingy" than others. That is, they're more sensitive to changes in the national trend. (Silver 2016).

Thus, this model is a very useful measure for determining the effect of national trends on individual states and how to determine polling data, but maybe not as useful in

determining if a state is a swing state and why that might be. Further, this model seems to presuppose some of the factors I will be examining more in depth in my research. It assumes that demographic features such as race and income definitively determine whether or not a state will swing with national trends. While obviously plausible, and things that I will test in my analysis, this method would seem to put the proverbial cart before the horse and use the independent variable I'm testing as part of the dependent variable, creating a tautology. Nonetheless, this method seems useful for determining individual level voting trends which could be extremely beneficial to my experiment. I likely will not use this model as a way of determining the elasticity of a state for my dependent variable because of this.

In line with my analysis provided above, I will use swing and closeness as my measures of elasticity moving forward. Swing, the number of times a state switched which party it voted for in a presidential election in a 20-year period, does the best job of representing the heart of my topic, elasticity. I will code this as either 1, 2, or 3 based on Republican wins over the 20-year period, with 1 meaning 0 or 5 wins, 2 meaning 1 or 4 wins, and 3 meaning 2 or 3 wins. Thus, a value of 3 is the most elastic.

Closeness, or the margin of victory in each presidential election, gets sufficiently close to measuring elasticity while providing more unique, precise data points for analysis. I will code closeness as a value of 100 minus the margin of victory for the Republicans. With this method, a small margin of victory would provide a large value making that state have a higher elasticity value. Republicans were chosen for both of these measures by a coin toss, since the same results will be gathered regardless of which party I use as my measure.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hypotheses and Data

In order to begin the process of determining what factors do and do not affect the elasticity of states in presidential elections, proper hypotheses must be drawn from each of the possible independent variables discovered in the literature review. Further, I will explore where my data for each hypothesis will come from (if available).

There are a number of demographic factors that need to be tested for this research endeavor, since it is clear that demographic shifts could affect each state's electorate makeup. The first hypothesis will test race.

> H1: As the relative proportion of nonwhite citizens increases, the elasticity of a state will increase until a certain point, from which the relationship between nonwhite citizens and elasticity will trend negatively.

This is a hypothesis that seems fairly straight forward. As diversity in a state increases, it would seem that this proliferation of different ideas would lead to differing opinions and a potential increase in state elasticity. However, there's no secret that the majority of the Republican voting block is white voters and that Democrats command a large control over nonwhite voters. Thus, an increase from 0% for nonwhite citizens would likely increase the elasticity of a state. However, this likely holds true only until a certain point. Beyond that point, increasing nonwhite citizens might decrease the elasticity of a state because there would no longer be a balance within the state. Yet, the "sweet spot" may extend past a 50/50 split of whites and minorities. As Teixeira lays out, there is often a

"translation gap" with minority voters, particularly Hispanic voters (Teixeira 2012, 6). The statistical analysis will account for this, likely showing that it takes larger percentages of nonwhite voters to move towards or away from swing state status.

The data that will be used to analyze the effect of nonwhite votes on state elasticity is pulled from Kelly and Witko's work on American inequality, which has the percentages of nonwhite citizens within each state from 1976 to 2004 (Kelly and Witko 2012). This data is useful, since the U.S. Census website only had data back to 2000 readily accessible. I will stop the data at 2004 so as to not skew the results by using two different data sources for the same variable.

Another important demographic feature is the size of the middle class of a state. Although Glaeser and Ward propose an alternative to economic models of swing states, this is an important feature worth testing.

H2: As the relative size of the middle class of a state increases, so does the elasticity of that state.

The middle class is an important measure to consider when testing the demographic features of swing states because of the potentially strong ability for middle class citizens to connect with messages on both sides of the aisle. Economically, middle class citizens often stand to gain some and lose some with either party. Accordingly, a large middle class seems likely to fluctuate from election to election depending on economic needs, potentially swinging the election in these states.

A problem with this hypothesis is that the middle class is difficult to define. For the purposes of this experiment, I will be using the bottom limit of $25,000 and the upper limit of $149,999. According to David Francis, $23,050 is the national poverty level for

a household of four people, making it a reasonable bottom line limit for the middle class (Francis 2012). However, since the U.S. Census measures in ranges of $15,000 to $24,999 and $25,000 to $34,999, I will round up and use $25,000 as the lower limit. Francis also argues that $150,000 is where the "5 percent" begins, or the upper class (Francis 2012). I will then appropriately use $149,999 as my upper limit. My measures will be done by household income as opposed to individual income in order to fit these ranges as closely as possible. The data for household income is coming from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Fact Finder tool ("Income in the Past 12 Months" 2015). Since the data was polled in 2010, I will extend the data to the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections since income data likely remained constant enough for plausible information to be gathered. Additionally, the data is set to 2012 inflation-adjusted dollars so that inflation will not skew the results.

The age makeup of states can be another important demographic feature that could impact the elasticity of a state.

> H3: As the relative proportion of young citizens increases, the elasticity of a state will increase until a certain point, from which the relationship between young citizens and elasticity will trend negatively.

Once again, age can be an important predictor in terms of voting preference. Younger voters tend to have differing political leanings and ideas than their older cohorts. Thus, an increase in the young adult population from 0% would seem to increase state elasticity. Additionally, younger voters tend to strongly vote Democrat, whereas older voters tend to vote Republican. Thus, this demographic would likely form a bell curve where elasticity would increase with the rate of young citizens until it reaches a "sweet

spot," at which point elasticity could start to decrease if the number of young citizens continues to increase.

This data is again sourced from the United States Census Bureau using their young adults data tool ("Young Adults Then and Now"). This data source determines young adults to be anyone who is 18 to 34 years old. This is then quantified as a percentage for each state, ranging from 1980 to 2010 in 10 year increments. I will extrapolate the data into the 10 year intervals that follow in order to provide a large number of data sets to test against (i.e., the 1980 data will be used for the 1980, 1984, and 1988 presidential elections). While it would be ideal to have more precise data for each year, the United States Census is only updated once every 10 years and is the most comprehensive source for such information.

Another important demographic feature to test is the religious make up of a state, as it can be an important indicator of how elastic that state should be.

H4: As the relative proportion of religious adherents increases, the elasticity of a state will increase.

Since religious adherents of different denominations tend to hold different views, I believe that an increase in religious adherents as a whole could potentially diversify the electorate and increasing elasticity. Once again, however, this a variable that could form a bell curve when related with elasticity. Those who are religious tend to vote more conservatively than their nonreligious counterparts. Thus, as the rate of religious adherents increases from 0%, this is likely to increase the elasticity of a state as nonreligious citizens are balanced against. However, there could eventually be a tipping point where the number of religious citizens would outweigh nonreligious citizens and

overwhelm elasticity in the opposite direction, minimizing the swing state status of such a state. However, I don't believe this to necessarily be the case and will test this hypothesis with a linear regression. I think that religious adherents and elasticity will continue to trend positively with elasticity because my data accounts for all religious backgrounds. Thus, an increase in the number of adherents would create a more diverse electorate, likely causing more elasticity.

The data for religious adherents that will be used comes from the Association of Religion Data Archives' 2000 and 2010 "Religious Congregations and Membership" studies ("Religious Congregations and Membership Study" 2001) ("U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations and Membership Study" 2011). These studies quantify religious adherents as anyone who is a self-proclaimed member of a place of worship and give data in terms of total religious adherents per 1,000 state residents. This includes all forms of religion, not just mainstream Christianity. The 2000 data will be extrapolated onto the 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections, while the 2010 data will be used for the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections. This will provide more data points while doing little to jeopardize the statistical design of the experiment, since these numbers change slowly.

Another important factor to test is the split between rural and metropolitan citizens in a state.

H5: As the relative proportion of rural citizens increases, the elasticity of a state will increase until a certain point, from which the relationship between rural citizens and elasticity will trend negatively.

Recently, rural voters have been known to vote Republican whereas metropolitan voters have been known to vote Democrat. This is similar to partisan sorting, but can be true absent partisan sorting. Thus, as the number of metropolitan and rural citizens reach a near equivalent value, one would expect the elasticity of such a state to increase due to a balancing in the number of "base" voters each party would possess. Beyond this balanced point, it seems likely that elasticity would decrease as the balance would be tipped in the other direction.

This data comes from the United States Census Bureau's 2010 "Population and Housing Counts" ("United States Summary: 2010" 2012). This data provides the percentage of each states' population that lives in rural areas. Again, this data will be extrapolated to both the 2008 presidential election and the 2012 presidential election since it is a statistic that is likely to change slowly and provides more data to be analyzed.

Beyond demographics, issue preferences seem to be important in predicting the elasticity of a state.

H6: As a state's citizens' beliefs on economic and social issues become more polarized in opposite ideological directions, the state becomes more elastic.

This hypothesis tests the conflict of issue preferences Teixeira highlights as a possibility for creating swing states (Teixeira 2012, 8). If the electorate is fairly conservative in terms of economic issues and fairly liberal in terms of social issues, or vice versa, it would make sense that the state would swing between parties since neither would be fully satisfactory to the electorate. Depending on which issue sets are most important to the citizens of such a state in a given year, they may decide to go with the Republican candidate in one election and a Democratic candidate in the next. Additionally, these

citizens may be susceptible to ideological "leap frogging" by presidential candidates, where the current president's party may be too extreme on certain issues. In this instance, the populace would likely vote for the opposite party. However, this party could then also be too extreme in the opposite direction on other issues and the citizens would switch back. This could create an endless cycle of swinging back and forth, creating a very elastic state.

The data for this hypothesis is found in the National Annenberg Election Survey which asked respondents a number of questions about their political leanings ("National Annenberg Election Survey"). For my research, I will be comparing respondents' answers to the survey's economic and social questions. The economic question asked respondents, "Generally speaking, when it comes to economic issues, such as taxes, the federal budget, and government spending, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?" and the social question asked respondents, "Generally speaking, when it comes to social issues, such as education, health care, abortion, guns, and crime, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?" ("National Annenberg Election Survey"). Since this data lends itself to the 2000 election, I will limit it to that and do a cross sectional analysis of that election using their measures of states tendency towards liberal or conservative leanings on both economic and social issues. I will find the difference between these two values and then run a regression with that value against my dependent variable measures. A larger value for this variable means that there is a greater difference between the average social ideology and average economic ideology in a state.

Presidential campaign efforts, operationalized as campaign visits, is another important independent variable that will need to be tested.

H7: Increased campaign efforts in a state correlate with that state being more elastic.

This hypothesis would help test whether or not swing states are at least somewhat self-fulfilling. Essentially, once a state is considered close in presidential elections, candidates will start spending more time in these states. This increased attention could make voters more thoughtful and moderate. Thus, even if other factors changed that would seem to decrease the elasticity of the state, it could remain elastic in presidential elections because of this increased attention. Plus, the increased visits from candidates would also increase media attention and solidify the states' status. Lawmakers and voters might even conscientiously try to keep the state as a swing state for the political and economic benefits it could bestow. The issue with testing this hypothesis, however, is it seems to lend itself towards being a tautology. It becomes difficult to separate cause and effect between these two variables. Accordingly, I will be cautious in making any sweeping conclusions based on the results of testing this hypothesis.

This data will again be a cross-sectional analysis, analyzing the 2016 presidential election. My data comes from Matthew Conlen who compiled all the campaign visits in the 2016 presidential election from September forward for both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump (Conlen 2016).

Next, the incentive to vote in a swing state is likely much higher than that of a non-swing state.

H8: As the incentive to vote increases, as measured by electoral votes per capita, the elasticity of the state increases as well.

Since the voters of a state with a high electoral votes per capita (EVPC) rating tend to have more of a numerical effect on the outcome of the presidential election than those with lesser EVPC, these voters also have more of an incentive to vote. This increased chance that an individual voter's vote will decide the election (often referred to as the p value in voting equations) likely increases voter turnout. The increased voter turnout should create a more diverse, informed electorate that can make a state more likely to swing between elections. While states try to allocate electoral votes in a roughly equivalent way, there are some states where the population is so small that the minimum of three electoral votes is too high to make voting power equal to states with larger populations. Thus, some people's votes count "more." Additionally, it is possible that campaigns may recognize this and put more effort into states with higher EVPC, be it campaign visits or finances. This could also explain the potential for high EVPC to generate more elasticity.

This data set will be created by dividing the electoral votes of a state by the population of the state for each year. The electoral vote information will be gathered from 270ToWin's electoral maps for each presidential election and the population information will be gathered from the United States Census Bureau's 2010 Population and Housing report which has data dating back to 1940 ("Historical Presidential Elections") ("United States Summary: 2010" 2012). Population data will be extrapolated moving forward in 10 year increments from each census data point, since, again, the United States census is only conducted every 10 years. This seems especially

theoretically sound, however, because of the fact that electoral votes are reallocated according to each new census's findings on population.

There are an additional two geographic trends I would like to test. The first of these hypotheses deals with the geographical polarization trend highlighted by Abramowitz et al., since they argue this is critical to the explanation of California's presidential shift (Abramowitz et al. 2006, 88).

H9: Geographical polarization of partisans correlates with a net decrease in the elasticity of states in presidential elections.

Geographical polarization would seem to correlate negatively with election elasticity because it means that there would be less of an open, bi-partisan discussion of politics in large areas of the state. Democrats likely win urban centers without much contestation and Republicans likely win rural locations easily as well. This means there is little debate of core party ideas on the local level, causing most of these people to vote along party lines in presidential elections. At that point, the state likely becomes red or blue depending on whether a large portion of the population is rural or urban.

Sadly, due to funding restraints, I will be unable to pursue this data point. Dave Leip's election data has county by county results for each state in each presidential election available, but for a hefty fee. I would have liked to look through this data and find out how many counties were won by significant margins and used this data to determine geographic polarization. This could be an area of further research given more resources.

The second of these hypotheses would test the correlation between redistricting, or "Gerrymandering," and the elasticity of a state.

H10: States which have been redistricted to create more polarized districts are less elastic in presidential elections than those whose districts' partisan makeups are more even.

This hypothesis follows a similar line of reasoning as hypothesis 9. The collapse of districts into heavily red and heavily blue would create lopsided local and house elections, which would likely cause less open discussion and debate of issues, leading to a less elastic, more extreme population. However, the key difference is that this process is forced by politicians as opposed to a natural occurrence like in hypothesis 9. This would seem to weaken the effect, since it would still be possible for diverse opinions to be discussed in geographically bipartisan regions. Nevertheless, there would still likely be a correlation present between redistricting and elasticity.

Again, this is a data set I will be unable to pursue due to a lack of resources. There seems to be no sufficient online database of when and where redistricting has occurred and it seems difficult to quantify the amount of redistricting that occurred. Thus, this is another area of potential further research.

Finally, it is important to detail where my dependent variable data will be derived. First, I will measure the number of times a state has flipped by simply counting using 270ToWin's electoral college maps ("Historical Presidential Elections"). I will be gathering this data from the 1940 presidential election up to the 2016 presidential election. I will measure this in terms of Republican victories per 20 year increment (or every 5 elections). I will count Republican victories based on a coin toss I conducted, as the data will be the same either way. The data for these 20 year increments will then be quantified with either a 1, 2, or 3. A 1 signifies that the state was won either 0 times or 5

times by Republicans in that span, meaning the state did not swing at all. A 2 signifies that the state was won by Republicans either 1 or 4 times, signifying that the state swung once in that time period. A 3 signifies that the state was won by Republicans either 2 or 3 times, meaning that it swung the maximum amount of times in that given period. While both ways of measuring the dependent variable measure elasticity, this measure will be termed the measure of swings.

Next, I will measure the closeness of each state using *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections* (Leip). This resource provides the margin of victory for either party in each state in each presidential election. Again, I will be measuring from the 1940 presidential election up to the 2016 presidential election. I will take the absolute value of that margin, given as a percentage, and subtract it from 100 to provide a number that increases as elections become closer. This will make it so that positive correlations are a sign that an independent variable increases elasticity, while a negative correlation points to an independent variable that decreases elasticity. For the reasons stated in Chapter Three, and due to limited resources, I will not be using FiveThrityEight's measure of state elasticity.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results

In order to empirically test my hypotheses about factors that predict state elasticity, I used Stata to run ordinary least squares regressions on the data I collected. First, I ran regressions with each of my independent variables by themselves for the two dependent variables. Then, I ran regressions with multiple independent variables, where the years I had data for allowed it, to see if any results changed with controls now present.

First, I will analyze the results of each independent variable's discreet regression in relation to swings. Any variable below that has two different values for the coefficient and p value was tested using a curvilinear regression, with the first number referring to the B value and the second number referring to the B^2 value.

Table 1: Independent Variables and Swings

Independent Variable	Coefficient	P Value	Number of Observations	Timespan
H1: Nonwhite Citizens	-0.3626895/ -0.205372	0.804/0.919	400	1976-2006
H2: Middle Class Households	0.0404358	0.043	102	2008-2012
H3: Young Adult Population	0.8800037/ -0.0149695	0.000/0.001	510	1980-2016
H4: Religious Adherents	-0.0014878	0.069	255	2000-2016
H5: Rural Citizens	0.021524/ -0.0004762	0.314/0.123	50	2012
H6: Issue Preferences	0.379223	0.670	48	2000
H7: Campaign Visits	0.0890959	0.000	50	2016
H8: EVPC	44239.51	0.026	1004	1940-2016

Most of these results do not come back as statistically significant because their p values are too high. In order to be able to reject the null hypothesis with 95% certainty, the p value of a regression must be 0.05 or lower. In any case where a curvilinear regression was used, both p values must be below 0.05 for the result to be statistically significant. A quick note, wherever the amount of data made it possible, I used the cluster function to ensure that the fact that data points within the same state could affect each other was considered in the p value. Accordingly, with this regression, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relation between the dependent and independent variable, cannot be rejected for H1, H4, H5, or H6. However, statistically significant results were found for H2, H3, H7, and H8.

H2 is the measure of middle class households and with its p value of 0.043, the null hypothesis can be rejected here. Due to its coefficient being substantially positive,

this hypothesis can be statistically proven using this regression since a positive coefficient would mean that middle class households and swings trend together positively. Thus, elasticity increases as middle class households increase in this regression model.

H3 is the measure of the young adult population of a state. Again, the p values of this independent variable are well below 0.05 at 0.000 and 0.001 respectively, meaning that this value is statistically significant. And with a substantial, positive coefficient for the r value and a substantial negative coefficient for the B^2 value, the null hypothesis can be rejected and this hypothesis is proven. This means that young adult populations do trend positively with swings up to a certain, from which the relationship becomes negative. This, in turn, means the young adult population creates a bell curve in relation to elasticity.

H7 is the measure of presidential campaign visits to a state and has a p value of 0.000, making it statistically significant. Additionally, with a substantial positive coefficient, this hypothesis would seem to be proven. However, due to how extremely low the p value is, I believe this just confirms that campaign visits are difficult to measure in comparison to elasticity because of the inherent tautology present. It is impossible to prove if the campaign visits are causing states to be elastic or if campaigns spend more time on elastic states because they are elastic. Nevertheless, this does prove that the two are correlated in some fashion. More research could be done on this topic, but given the data I am unable to prove my hypothesis even with the statistically significant results.

Finally, H8 is the measure of electoral votes per capita and the p value for this independent variable is 0.026, which makes it statistically significant. The coefficient for this variable is much larger than the others, likely because of the small unit of measure used for this variable. Regardless, the positive nature of the substantial coefficient shows that within this regression, H8 can be proven. Thus, electoral votes per capita increase alongside swings and elasticity.

Next, I will analyze the results of each independent variable's discrete regression in relation to my other measure of elasticity, closeness.

Table 2: Independent Variables and Closeness

Independent Variable	Coefficient	P Value	Number of Observations	Timespan
H1: Nonwhite Citizens	6.859093/-0.5631132	0.609/0.975	400	1976-2006
H2: Middle Class Households	0.7655703	0.059	102	2008-2012
H3: Young Adult Population	0.8800037/-0.0149695	0.000/0.001	510	1980-2016
H4: Religious Adherents	-.0419566	0.028	255	2000-2016
H5: Rural Citizens	1.50704/-0.0236426	0.051/0.039	50	2012
H6: Issue Preferences	-1.937108	0.889	48	2000
H7: Campaign Visits	0.8828303	0.001	50	2016
H8: EVPC	-552694.2	0.161	1004	1940-2016

Before beginning analysis on this set of regressions, it is important to reiterate that swings and closeness are both different ways of measuring elasticity. Accordingly, results will change because of this with advantages for each way of measuring explained

in Chapter Three. Additionally, upon testing the correlation between the dependent variables, it is apparent that both measure the same thing but in different ways with a correlation value of roughly 0.30. Again, when possible, I used the cluster function for states, making the p value more reliable in this testing.

In this set of regressions, only three hypotheses have a significant result. H3, H4, and H7 are the only regressions with statistically significant results, meaning that the null hypothesis for each can be rejected. H1, H2, H5, H6, and H8 all have too high of p values and, accordingly, the null hypothesis for each of these cannot be rejected. However, it is worth noting that the p values for both H2 and H5 were extremely close to being statistically significant. Further research could help prove or disprove a possible relationship present there.

H3 is the measure of the young adult population. Because the p value of both the B and the B^2 values are well below 0.05 the null hypothesis can be rejected and my hypothesis can be statistically confirmed. Since B is positive and B^2 is negative, this confirms my sweet spot theory. The data would make a bell curve, with closeness and the young adult population increasing together up until a certain point, from which closeness would decrease as the young adult population continued to increase. This would further mean that the young adult population creates a bell curve in relation to state elasticity.

H4 is the measure of religious adherents in a state and has a p value of 0.028, making it statistically significant enough to reject the null hypothesis. However, my hypothesis cannot be proven because the coefficient for this hypothesis is substantially

negative. Thus, as the number of religious adherents increases, the closeness and elasticity of a state decreases.

H7 is the measure of presidential campaign visits. Again, the p value for this variable is extremely low at 0.001. While this is statistically significant enough to reject the null hypothesis, I do not believe I can either prove or disprove my hypothesis even though the coefficient is substantially positive. This is again because of the inherent tautology present in attempting to measure this variable. This belief, made explicit above, is further fueled by having once again another extremely small p value.

Next, I will evaluate a regression which uses nonwhite citizens, young adult population, religious adherents, and electoral votes per capita as controls against each other in relation to swings. These variables were chosen because the years in which I had data for them lined up sufficiently to make for a compelling regression. This will allow me to evaluate the independent effect of each variable on swings, while accounting for the other independent variables in the model. I also conducted a beta analysis, which allows me to determine which statistically significant independent variables have a stronger effect on the dependent variable, swings. A beta coefficient is a way of determining if one standard deviation of change in one variable is more or less than one standard deviation of another variable.

Table 3: Independent Variables as Controls and Swings

Independent Variable	Coefficient	P Value	Beta Value
H1: Nonwhite Citizens	-0.127016/-0.9548026	0.964/0.811	0.260/ -0.117
H3: Young Adult Population	-0.3563548/0.0064874	0.736/0.757	-0.739/ 0.646
H4: Religious Adherents	-0.0014721	0.149	-0.225
H8: EVPC	-204340.2	0.009	-0.296

Note: Number of observations=100. Timespan=2000-2004.

Here, the only independent variable that is statistically significant is H8, measuring electoral votes per capita. With a p value of 0.004, the null hypothesis can be rejected using this regression. Interestingly, with these other variables used as controls, the coefficient has become substantially negative in relation to swings and elasticity. There are two possible explanations for this. First, the data became more limited since the number of years available were more limited from the other variables being used as controls. This could have affected the variable. Second, it is possible that these variables, being used as controls, changed the outcome in a significant way in and of themselves. This flip, nevertheless, makes it difficult to conclude the direction by which electoral votes per capita correlates with swings and elasticity. However, the null hypothesis can still be soundly rejected.

Finally, I will analyze the same variables as above and run them as regressions against the closeness dependent variable.

Table 4: Independent Variables as Controls and Closeness

Independent Variable	Coefficient	P Value	Beta Value
H1: Nonwhite Citizens	-41.1758/71.7572	0.085/0.054	-0.531/ 0.555
H3: Young Adult Population	9.336155/-0.2598744	0.361/0.219	1.222/ -1.633
H4: Religious Adherents	-0.0277442	0.001	-0.267
H8: EVPC	-6757803	0.000	-0.618

Note: Number of observations=100. Timespan=2000-2004.

Interestingly, this regression provided two statistically significant results. H1 and H3's null hypotheses could not be rejected due to its high p value. However, H4 and H8 were both statistically significant.

H4's null hypothesis can also be rejected using this regression with a p value of 0.004. Combining this with a fairly substantial negative coefficient shows that as religious adherents increase in a state, the closeness and elasticity of the state decrease. This disproves H4.

H8's null hypothesis can be rejected as well, with a p value of 0.000. With a substantial negative coefficient, this would disprove H8 and show that EVPC and closeness and elasticity are negatively correlated. This would seem to bolster the results found in Table 3 and downplay the results found in Table 1. Additionally, thanks to the beta analysis, it is clear the negative correlation between H8 and closeness is stronger than the relationship between H4 and closeness. This would seem to indicate that electoral votes have a strong effect on closeness and elasticity. However, the number of religious adherents in a state should also be taken into consideration.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Having conducted a thorough statistical analysis of the different variables that could influence the elasticity of a state, there are a few general conclusions that have become clear.

First, it would seem that an increase in middle class households does increase the elasticity of a state. This positive correlation was proven through regression data in Table 1 in the previous chapter. This makes intuitive sense for a number of reasons. First, middle class households seem the most likely to be affected equally by economic upswings and downswings. It is well known that the state of the economy can have a significant impact on individual elections. This means that a state with a large middle class would likely be the most effected by economic changes, leading to easy flips between political parties in presidential elections. Second, the middle class is the economic division where there is the most overlap between each party's positions. Republicans tend to cater to the middle and upper classes and Democrats tend to cater to the lower and middle classes. Accordingly, middle class voters could go one way or the other fairly easily because they stand to gain and stand to lose with either party in different ways.

Additionally, it appears that my third hypothesis can be proven. Both Table 1 and Table 2 provided statistically significant results indicating that the relationship between elasticity and the young adult population creates a bell curve. Thus, as the young adult

population of a state increases, so too does the elasticity of the state until it hits a sweet point. From there, elasticity decreases as the young adult population continues to increase. This makes a lot of sense because of the well-known fact that young voters tend to vote liberal at a higher rate than the rest of the population. An initial increase in this demographic would boost the Democrats, balancing against the Republicans, until the tipping point is reached. Even though there were no statistically significant results found in Table 3 and Table 4, I believe the data from Table 1 and Table 2 is sufficient. I think this difference can be accounted for by the number of observations for each, with the first two regressions having 510 observations and the last two regressions consisting of only 100 observations. This smaller data set would make it more difficult to obtain a statistically significant p value.

Next, it appears that my fourth hypothesis has been proven false and that the number of religious adherents in a state actually correlate negatively with elasticity. This is proven through the regression data found in Table 2 and Table 4 in the last chapter. In hindsight, this makes a great deal of sense. While the religious adherents value includes all religious creeds and denominations, the largest gains as this number goes up would almost certainly be among Christians. Most Christians hold somewhat similar political beliefs depending on how regularly they attend church (Putnam & Campbell 2012, 132). Thus, if the number of religious adherents, and accordingly Christians, in a state increases, that state likely becomes more monogamous in political beliefs, as well as religious beliefs. This would likely decrease the elasticity of such a state. It can be concluded then that the number of religious adherents in a state negatively correlates with state elasticity.

Additionally, it appears that I can reject my eighth hypothesis stating that electoral votes per capita (EVPC) correlates positively with elasticity. In reality, it appears that it correlates negatively. This is less conclusive than my other results because the regression in Table 1 actually found a positive correlation. However, Table 3 and Table 4 found a negative correlation. I believe the negative correlations, in hindsight, make more sense for a few reasons. First, I believe Table 3 and Table 4 are more theoretically sound because they show negative trends using both of my dependent variable measures and use other variables as controls. Additionally, this seems to make more sense from a commonsense viewpoint because the states that tend to have the largest EVPC are the states with the smallest population, such as Wyoming, Alaska, and other sparsely populated states. These states may not be worthwhile to campaigns and are largely ignored. Further, these small population states are very rural, a demographic feature that largely favors Republicans. Additionally, this data set can be interpreted to show that higher electoral votes actually increase the elasticity of a state. Under this framing, it again makes sense that campaigns would pay more attention to states with larger electoral vote shares, potentially making them more elastic.

On that note, my data found a statistically significant positive correlation between campaign visits and elasticity in the data in Table 1 and Table 2. However, I do not believe I can come to any sound conclusions on this due to the inherent tautology found here. It is nearly impossible to determine which variable is the dependent variable and which is the independent variable when relating elasticity and campaign visits. It is possible that because a state is elastic, and accordingly up for grabs, campaign visits would increase to try to win that state. On the other hand, it is equally likely that certain

states have received more campaign visits and this makes those states more competitive and close, and thus more elastic. Either seems possible and I cannot make any sound conclusions. This could be an area of further research.

Finally, there are multiple hypotheses that deserve further testing moving forward given better resources and data. My first hypothesis looking at nonwhite citizens found no significant results. This could be extended upon using a larger data set. It is also possible, however, that nonwhite voters simply do not have a significant effect on elasticity due to the translation gap discussed earlier. Yet, I find this unlikely given the stress placed on winning some of these key demographics by political parties each election.

My fifth hypothesis, testing for the rural/urban divide, found no statistically significant results either. However, this dataset became extremely close to being statistically significant in Table 2, making this a worthwhile variable to pursue in the future given more data. This dataset was very limited due to my inability to find data through the United States Census beyond the year 2010. Thus, further research could attempt to find and/or create better data and utilize it in testing the effect of rural or urban citizens on elasticity. But, it is once again possible that there is no correlation between this variable and elasticity.

My sixth hypothesis also found no statistically significant results. It was testing for issue preferences among citizens and seeing if a divide between economic and social partisanship would create elasticity. This hypothesis was again hampered by a small data set since only the year 2000 was testable. A more substantial dataset could prove useful

in testing this hypothesis. Nevertheless, it is possible there is also no correlation between issue preference and elasticity.

Finally, I was unable to run any tests for my ninth and tenth hypotheses. I could not secure the data needed for testing the effect of partisan sorting due to a lack of funding necessary. Additionally, I was unable to test for redistricting due to a lack of data available. A research extension here could utilize the existing, costly data, find new data, or create new data set in order to test for these possible explanations of the elasticity of states.

Overall, it would appear that a large number of middle class households, a low number of religious adherents, a median percentage of young adults, and a low EVPC are the best predictors of a state being a presidential swing state. More research should be conducted to further confirm these findings. Nevertheless, political scientists and pollsters should look to these indicators when trying to predict the elasticity of a state in upcoming presidential elections. These results are not only useful for political scientists and pollsters, but also, potentially even more importantly, for presidential campaigns themselves as they attempt to determine which states are worth their time and resources each election cycle.

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