



WITH THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE, EVERY VOTE MATTERS

Opponents of the Electoral College often claim that only a handful of “swing states” matter in presidential elections. Voters in “safe states,” they say, are irrelevant. But in reality, successful candidates must appeal to voters in both swing and safe states.

The Electoral College requires a majority—at least 270 electoral votes—to be elected president. Swing states typically have between 75 and 200 electoral votes. In other words, no one becomes President without support in both kinds of states. Presidential campaigns begin by addressing the interests and needs of voters in a large block of safe states, and then add to that base by appealing to voters in swing states.

Candidates that take safe states for granted risk losing those states. Examples include Barack Obama winning the supposedly safe Republican states of Indiana, North Carolina, and Virginia in 2008, and Donald Trump winning the Democratic “Blue Wall” states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin in 2016.

The claim that only swing states matter also ignores the party nominating processes, where candidates appeal to voters across the country. Democrats and Republicans routinely campaign in safe states in this critical early phase of the campaign, pledging to address the needs of those voters.

The presidential campaign process is more than just the two final months, when ads and candidate visits become more focused. Presidential candidates must already have support in safe states, and then earn the support of voters in swing states, in order to win the White House.

KEY POINTS

- Every voter in every state is important in presidential elections because a candidate must win both “swing” and “safe” states to become president.
- Presidential campaigns begin with the nominating process and last many months, with candidates focusing appealing to voters in “swing” and “safe” states.
- Ignoring the interests of voters in safe states risks losing those states to an opponent, as has happened multiple times in recent elections.