ONE NATION, UNDER CONTROL:
Analyzing the 2016 Electoral College’s Influences on Vote Weight
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Background and Introduction
Many Americans erupted as Donald Trump won the 2016 presidency without winning the popular vote. Nearly all criticism pointed towards the Electoral College’s two-senator add-on claiming it dilutes urban states and over-represents rural states.

Yet, little to no attention was paid to the nation’s chiefly employed electoral vote allocation system, known as winner-take-all (WTA). In such, a state exclusively allocates its electoral votes to its plurality winner and none to any other candidate.

WTA critics have a history of examining the skew the system creates on a national level – like electing an unpopular president, but seldom to its state-level effects. Thus, this report quantifies both electoral influences to compare their corresponding impacts on state’s vote weights, or the relative impact each vote had on the 2016 presidential election.

Research Questions
- What factors influenced state vote weights during the 2016 election?
- How does the winner-take-all electoral vote allocation method impact vote weight?
- How does the two-senators-per-state rule impact vote weight?

Methodology and Analyses
The map below encapsulates the relative impact caused by states’ deployment of winner-take-all. The shading of each state represents:

Relative Vote Weight Decreases after WTA
Relative Vote Weight Increases after WTA

By re-distributing electoral votes proportionally to population alone, the report omits the current two-senator add-on. Then, by comparing states’ vote weights during the 2016 election to a proportional apportionment reveals the add-on’s specific impact.

The analyses find that small states advantages are much greater than the disadvantages placed on large states. For example, the greatest advantage was +2.1 (WY) while the greatest disadvantage was -0.2 (FL).

The map above illustrates the impacts of the two-senator add-on. Each state’s shading represents:

Relative Vote Weight of Roughly 1
Relative Vote Weight of Roughly 2
Relative Vote Weight of Roughly 3

By controlling voter turnout, relative vote weights are compared before and after each state’s electoral allocation – leaving WTA’s exclusive impact. Once again, the positive impact certain states received greatly outnumbered the negative impact of others.

Using state party ID data, the report found a clear trend: the more diverse a state is, the more likely it is to receive orange shading – or to lose influence during the 2016 election. This means states’ vote weights decreases as its diversity increases. However, most notably, neither influences placed higher vote weights on the overwhelming majority of the nation’s swing states.

Conclusion and Main Findings
The U.S. map above accentuates the electoral discrepancy revealed by this report’s analyses on the two-senator add-on and states’ deployment of WTA. Each state is labeled by the number of campaign visits it received during the 2016 presidential campaign – with no label meaning zero visits. The 20 states coded in dark red possessed the greatest vote weights, or influence, during the 2016 election.

Despite this, the campaign tally looks as if the 2016 candidates actually avoided states with the greatest electoral influence. As a result, this report concludes candidates are no longer interested in states with the highest vote weights – a common argument used against the Electoral College. Rather, the universal employment of WTA causes candidates to cluster their attention towards states with high political diversity.

Summary of Influences on Vote Weights in 2016:
- Voter Turnout — Range: -0.4 to 0.7
  - 17 states’ vote weights increased due to low turnout
  - As voter turnout increases, vote weights decrease
- Two-Senator Add-On — Range: -0.2 to 2.1
  - Exactly half of the states received a positive impact
  - The placed advantage was much higher than any placed disadvantage
- Winner-take-all System — Range: -0.2 – 1.2
  - More Republican states benefited from WTA than Democratic states in 2016
  - States w/ low political cohesion are most impacted

Author’s Acknowledgments
Remarkably, the above influences on states’ vote weights are largely inconsequential in the current electoral environment. Winner-take-all systems have systematically removed rural states’ electoral advantage by causing candidates to focus on competitive states. Likewise, more diverse states’ high voter turnouts simultaneously decrease their vote influence. Thus, the real problem is the two-party gridlock that WTA forces the nation’s mixed electorate into.

The rise of NPV, a plan to remove the Electoral College’s insulation, will further complicate this. In NPV states, they will allocate their electoral votes to the national plurality winner, rather than their state winner. This report urges that NPV will solely transfer the current prioritization of diverse states to popular ones, upholding the two-party death grip. Rather than abolishing the nation’s federalist elections entirely, simply appropriating or allocating electoral votes proportionally can solve this dilemma while keeping the system’s state-based integrity.