A Bug in Democracy:
Real and Mythical Risks of the Electoral College

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Three false beliefs about the Electoral College

1. Popular-vote mismatches are rare.
2. A popular vote would favor large coastal states.
3. Current mechanisms are secure from interference.
Two Gilded Ages: Unreliable Elections

Popular vote margin of winner (%)

Year

1840 1860 1880 1900 1920 1940 1960 1980 2000

Racial divisions
Technological disruption
Increasing inequality
Deep partisanship

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The popular vote winner has lost one in three close elections

Five failures, including the first time the popular vote was ever tallied in 1824
Even when the popular vote margin is up to 10%, a 1 in 7 chance of a loss
getting a plurality would have required votes from 41 states
Reducing the decision to a few states opens up vulnerability to hacking.

How many votes would it have taken to flip ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electoral College</th>
<th>National Popular Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>2016 (Trump v. Clinton)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>2004 (Bush v. Kerry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600</td>
<td>2000 (Bush v. Gore)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>1976 (Carter v. Ford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>1968 (Nixon v. Humphrey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>1960 (Kennedy v. Nixon)</td>
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Facebook said in its initial statement that about 25% of the ads purchased by Russians during the election "were geographically targeted."
Three bugs in today’s Electoral College

1. A popular-vote mismatch can happen in 1 out of 3 close elections.
2. The Electoral College does not favor broad coalitions.
3. Battleground states open a security hole.
The national government belongs to the whole American people.

Our whole experiment is meaningless unless we are to make this a democracy in the fullest sense of the word.

If the minority is as powerful as the majority there is no use of having political contests at all, for there is no use in having a majority.

Theodore Roosevelt
26th President, 1901-1909