

## CENSUS AND SENSIBILITY

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The recent population numbers from the 2000 census tell many stories about this vast nation of ours, now ruled by the Baltimore Ravens, with the executive power exercised by George W. Bush.

Let us start down the road by asking: Whose votes were underweighted in the 2000 election? (No one was "disenfranchised" – that is a maliciously rejuvenated whip-word from yesteryear connoting a purposeful act of exclusion.)

Most obviously, although generally unremarked upon, it was principally the votes of the people of the South and West that were underweighted. The census population count was made as of April 1, 2000, seven months before the national election. Yet the Electoral College votes were awarded on the basis of 1990 census population numbers, gathered 10 years before the election.

Much happened in those 10 years. The U.S. resident population grew by 13 percent -- by 33 million people -- to 285 million. Each of the 50 states grew, but at very different rates. Each of the regions grew, but at very different rates. Thus Texas grew by 23 percent. New York grew by 5 percent. The northeastern and Midwestern states grew by 5.5 percent and 8 percent respectively. The southern and western states grew by 17 percent and 20 percent respectively.

The politics of this matter are fairly clear: southern and western states, disproportionately Republican, gained electoral votes. Eastern and Midwestern states, disproportionately Democratic, lost electoral votes.

Arizona, Georgia, Texas (all solidly Republican) and Florida (barely Republican) each gained two electoral votes. New York (Democratic) and Pennsylvania (mildly Democratic) each lost two electoral votes. (The exception that proves the rule comes from our dimly lit Gargantua, Calif., where growth has slowed down, yielding only one additional seat -- for the Democrats.)

Had the election of 2000 used up-to-date apportionment numbers, which were easily available, the Bush-Cheney ticket would have gained seven electoral votes and the Gore-Lieberman ticket would have lost seven. That would have made the final Electoral College vote Bush-Cheney 278, Gore-Lieberman 260, a spread of 18.

Now had Florida's votes been personally recounted ballot by ballot, and had it turned out that Gore won, he would have added to his total the state's 25 electoral votes (or 27 votes using the new formula). But in that case, Republicans would likely have asked for re-examinations in the very close states of New Mexico (50.03 percent of votes cast for Gore and Bush went to Gore), Wisconsin (50.11 percent) and Iowa (50.16 percent).

Not going to happen. Never destined to happen. The law is the law, and the law says that in presidential years ending in zero, we use an apportionment formula that reflects rusting demographic data that is 10 years old.

Beyond retrospective pipe-dreaming, however, is the presidential election of 2004. Three American presidents have been elected with less than a plurality of popular votes (John Quincy Adams, Rutherford B. Hayes and Benjamin Harrison.) None was re-elected.

How about Bush? Well, he's had a splendid start, bolstering his position as a moderate conservative, the basic power slot in American political life today. And he will go into the next election with an additional seven electoral votes, an amount equal to the votes of a state the size of Connecticut.

None of this is new, nor is it going to stop.

In the 20th century, southern and western growth was boosted by political and technological factors. The end of segregation changed southern life forever, vastly for the better. (In 1900 the median income in the South was about half that of the non-South. In 2000 it is about even, adjusting for regional cost-of-living differentials.)

Western and southern growth was also encouraged by air conditioning. When the history of this galaxy is written, the invention of air conditioning is going to rank up there with the big events: the wheel, fire, fast food. The fastest growing states from 1990 to 2000 were Nevada (by 66 percent) and Arizona (by 40 percent), not fun places when not air-conditioned. About 95 percent of the population in the hot American states have air conditioning.

Neither civil rights progress nor air conditioning will go away. Quoth the raven, nevermore. As of the 2000 census count, 58 percent of the nation was southern or western. That proportion will grow. For good or for ill. Get used to it. Surprising to many, our statistically growing region south of the Mason-Dixon line includes two very special jurisdictions: our nation's glorious capitol, where I reside, and the purple province of Maryland, home of the galactic football champions, the Baltimore-Washington Standard Metropolitan Area Ravens.

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