The "Urban SuperState" and the Electoral College

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This is a very dangerous time for America. Since the 2016 Presidential Election we have heard strident calls for doing away with the Electoral College. The Electoral College is a protective mechanism that prevents the populations of the most highly populated states from controlling the nation’s powers and ignoring the interests of others in the vast territory of the United States with a highly diverse population. Allowing the allocation of political power to be made as if America were a single state rather than a union of fifty states destroys the principles of federalism that provide the foundation of the Constitution and would empower a collection of ten very large US metropolitan areas acting in lockstep on a very limited set of issues to impose their will on everyone else in our diverse nation. This is precisely what the Electoral College helps to avoid.

As divided as the electoral map of America looks when broken down into a Red State/Blue State picture after the 2016 presidential election, that doesn’t begin to tell the full story about how fractured the nation has become. An “Urban SuperState” has emerged capable of controlling much of the nation’s agenda and disenfranchising citizens who live in over 90 percent of the nation’s states and localities. The thought that ten to twelve urban metropolitan areas including Los Angeles, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, Detroit, Cleveland and Columbus, Seattle, and Baltimore (city and county) could dictate their agendas to the rest of the country if they were able to eliminate the Electoral College is offensive to the point I need a “safe space”. Fortunately I have one. It is called the Electoral College.

We are in an age of powerful factions made even more dominant and dangerous by the existence of the Internet. James Madison considered factions to be inevitable parts of a political community. In Federalist No. 10 he explained that since people hold differing opinions on issues and own different amounts of wealth and property they seek to advance their interests by creating alliances with people similar to them. All others are seen as outsiders and threats. Madison saw the Constitution as a combination of the republican and democratic forms of government, recognizing that a purely majoritarian system would be subject to abuse. He emphasized that with "the great and aggregate interests being referred to the national, the local and particular to the State legislatures" the power of government was less likely to be centralized in the hands of a dominant faction.

Madison’s idea was that the resulting diffusion of power in a democratic republic would prevent any one faction or allied collection of factions from gaining full control of the nation’s instruments of power. His warning resonates when applied to the fragmented American society of today where allied identity groups are not only insisting that their faction has the sole legitimate “truth” but that anyone who disagrees with that faction’s “truth” is a moron, fascist, bigot, “populist”, “nationalist”, xenophobe or some other kind of “phobe” or “hater".
The principles of federalism and the recognition that unique powers were reserved to the states, erected barriers against a single self-interested faction or group of collaborating factions taking over all power and using the simplistic language of “majority controls all” to do whatever they want. Mill condemned the majority-takes-all argument in On Liberty, calling it “the tyranny of the majority”. At this point the only thing that prevents the disenfranchising of a significant part of the American population by the factions that comprise the Urban SuperState is the Electoral College. That brilliant balancing mechanism was created to protect the interests of states in our federalist democratic republic based on representative allocations of power and political voice. This was intended to protect the interests of each state and recognize that different states and their populations have differing interests, values, goals and preferences.

Madison’s idea of protecting the collective community of the United States against the “tyranny” of competing factions is still vital to maintaining the integrity of the nation as a federalist alliance of states and local communities. America is not a single “super-community” where all choices get to be made by a few allied factions able to seize and hold the reins of power through fear, propaganda, control of the media and now the ability to consolidate large blocs of identically interested people in a small number of major urban areas that collectively create a focused interest group that trumps the interests of everyone else in the nation. The Electoral College was created in Article II, Section I of the Constitution to block such an outcome.

The Rise of the “Urban SuperState”

There were 134,398,059 total votes cast for president in the 2016 election. Although the vote has shifted as absentee ballots were counted, as of this writing Clinton had received 64,424,986 and Trump 62,327,523. Almost seven million people voted for neither Trump nor Clinton because they couldn’t stand either candidate or preferred one of the minor party candidates. Even though the Red/Blue state map shows a divide in which the West and Upper East coasts were in Clinton’s camp and the “flyover” wasteland between the coasts supported Trump, the more accurate depiction centers on a very limited set of major urban areas, the Urban SuperState, versus everyone else. Even in the states where Clinton won the majority vote a very large percentage of individual counties were not in her camp. They didn’t have to be because she dominated the Urban SuperState. The most prominent members of the “Urban SuperState” gave Hillary Clinton 9,556,408 votes more than Donald Trump and she still only had two million more popular votes. This shows a deep abyss between the interests of the limited cluster of major US cities (the Urban SuperState) and the rest of the country.

Here is a picture of what I am talking about.

In California Hillary Clinton received an enormous vote margin over Donald Trump in five counties associated with major urban areas. Adding up the voting margin for the counties of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Clara, San Mateo and San Diego, Clinton received 2,528,011 votes more than Trump. These five counties alone were enough to provide her entire national popular vote margin. In the state of New York, in the four urban counties of
the Bronx, Kings, New York and Queens, Clinton received 1,537,797 more votes than Trump. In Wisconsin Clinton outpointed Trump by 309,131 votes in the urban counties of Milwaukee and Dane. In Illinois she had a vote margin of 1,158,594 in Chicago’s Cook County alone. Philadelphia County gave Hillary Clinton 457,399 votes more than Trump even though he won the state. In sparsely populated Colorado Clinton had a margin of 213,910 votes from the counties of Denver and Boulder. In Ohio the combination of the urban counties of Cuyahoga and Franklin (Cleveland and Columbus) provided 348,713 more votes to Clinton than Trump even though he won the overall Ohio vote. The Seattle area alone gave Clinton 501,309 votes more than Trump while Oregon’s Multnomah County (Portland) provided Clinton with a 224,407 margin. Detroit’s Wayne County gave Clinton a margin of 390,441 votes and Virginia’s Arlington, Fairfax and Richmond counties provided a 334,131 edge to Clinton. Orleans Parrish (New Orleans) provided a Clinton margin of 109,704 votes of a total number cast with Clinton 133,996 and Trump 24,292. In Massachusetts the counties of Middlesex, Norfolk and Suffolk provided a pro-Clinton margin of 583,974 votes. Baltimore (city and county) along with Montgomery and Prince Georges counties in Maryland went for Clinton 1,095,070 versus Trump’s 295,192 votes.

The more disturbing problem is not simply one of absolute vote counts but the percentages and ratios. These demonstrate a radical disjunction between the Urban SuperState voters and those outside its boundaries. The pro-Clinton ratio in Maryland’s Prince Georges County was almost 11:1, 8:1 in Baltimore (City) and 3:1 in Montgomery County. The District of Columbia offers one of the most distorted ratios imaginable, with Clinton receiving 270,107 votes more than Trump from slightly more than 282,000 total votes cast, a 23:1 pro-Clinton imbalance. There is a message in voting proportions such as Massachusetts’ Middlesex County where Clinton received 508,919 votes to Trump’s 216,163, or Suffolk County where the vote was 241,212 to 50,042. In Detroit’s Wayne County (Detroit) Clinton had 519,444 to Trump’s 228,993. San Francisco County gave Clinton 345,072 to Trump’s 37,688, a 9 to 1 multiple, while for Los Angeles the totals were 2,160,538 to 681,971, a more than three to one margin. In San Mateo County the ratio of Clinton to Trump votes was 4:1, Santa Clara 3.5:1 and Santa Cruz more than 4:1. In The Bronx Clinton received 318,403 votes and Trump only 34,424, a 9:1 “stomping” while in New York County the ratio was more than 8:1 and 4.5:1 in Kings County at 595,086 Clinton and 133,653 Trump.

Disproportionate ratios such as these, in an election where each candidate clearly possessed very serious flaws, suggest that voters were operating according to deeply held biases, stereotypes and agendas that could not be altered. Such Urban SuperState ratios evoke the “pretend” democracies run by dictatorial regimes where there was typically an almost 100 percent vote in favor of the ruling party’s candidate. The Urban SuperState vote ratios in the Clinton/Trump contest have that “taste” of authoritarian mindlessness and it is a bit foul.

Why talk about vote margins, ratios and the urban locations from which they come? The point is that while “certain people” seem to trumpet the virtues of diversity, the massive advantage in Urban SuperState voting received by Hillary Clinton as well as the stunning voting ratios rejects diversity. It also demonstrates an unusually consistent urban voter
mindset and set of interests and exposes national divisions that are unlikely to be repaired. The dramatically unbalanced voting patterns represented by the urban vote reveals an electorate in lockstep marching in unison to the “music” of a limited set of concerns. This may also represent a lack of engagement with, or awareness of, a host of critical issues such as jobs, the American economy, religious beliefs, the role of government, an out of control national debt, tax burdens, ISIS and the Middle East, educational quality, illegal immigration, nuclear tensions with Iran, the implications of the re-emergence and intentions of China and Russia, the unfairness of globalist trade policies and others.

Nor should concern about such issues be taken as a lack of concern with issues of race, gender and other forms of discrimination. The deeper point is that in the Urban SuperState areas there is a more limited set of concerns driving the voting patterns beyond any rational norm. Nor is the answer only that of race, gender, or preservation of federal programs. I would guess, for example, that a significant contributor to the incredible margins Clinton enjoyed in the District of Columbia, and the near DC counties of Northern Virginia and Maryland had much to do with the fear that a Trump administration would slash federal jobs. Several million federal government employees live in the metropolitan area of the District, many military do as well, and state and local government workers and teachers add to that total. Clinton offered business-as-usual and Trump equals uncertainty. A high number of college students and faculty in the area’s universities likely contributed as well.

My fear is that the residents of the Urban SuperState are caught up in a culture of propaganda and hostility or contempt toward all others they see as not being like them. This is, ironically, a reversed version of the smug and “phobic” attitudes that our urban elites and propagandists attribute to the “unwashed hordes” of Middle America. A brilliant management guru, Peter Drucker, once described the phenomenon in a book titled The New Realities. Drucker wrote about the “new pluralism”, saying: “The new pluralism ... focuses on power. It is a pluralism of single-cause, single-interest groups—the “mass movements” of small but highly disciplined minorities. Each of them tries to obtain through power what it could not obtain through numbers or through persuasion. Each is exclusively political.” This self-absorbed narrowness of “single-cause, single-interest” concerns is what we now face in the SuperState’s quest for power.

In his wonderfully insightful book Propaganda, Jacques Ellul describes how propaganda depends on the inculcation of stereotypes as a way to control the minds of a group’s adherents. He explains: “A stereotype is a seeming value judgment, acquired by belonging to a group, without any intellectual labor.... The stereotype arises from feelings one has for one’s own group, or against the “out-group.” Man attaches himself passionately to the values represented by his group and rejects the cliches of the out-groups.... The stereotype, ... helps man to avoid thinking, to take a personal position, to form his own opinion.” I challenge anyone to disprove the claim that we no longer have intelligent political discourse, only the barbed missiles of propaganda and stereotypes.