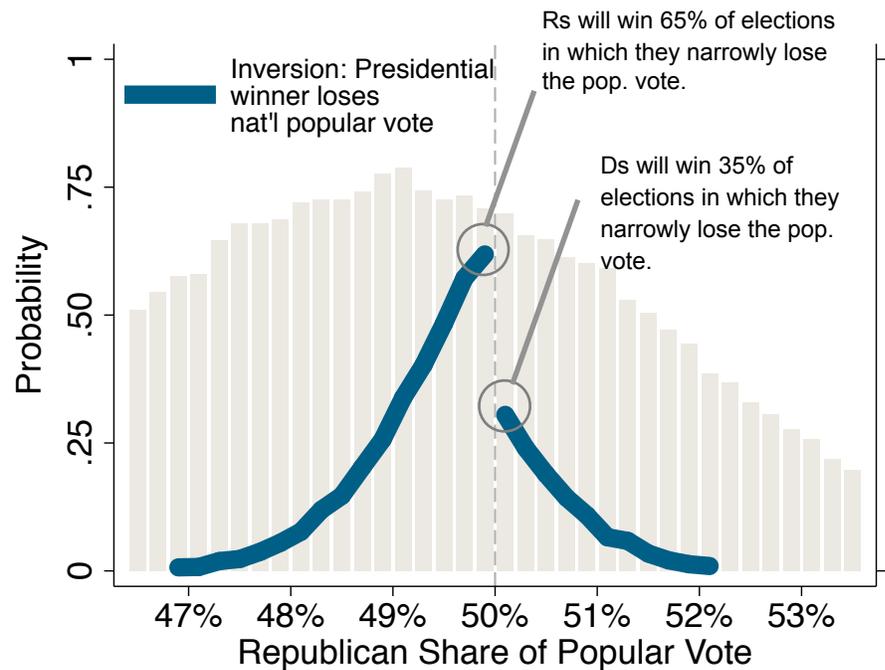


Is an inversion likely in the 2020 Presidential election and future elections? Based on the last 30 years of data from Presidential elections, yes.

The figure shows the probability of an electoral inversion, computed from 1988-2016 election results.

An inversion is likely in any election—including a future election—with a national popular vote margin within a few percentage points. This is true for any generic pair of major party candidates.



If an election in 2020 or later is close, then it is likely that the winner will lose the popular vote again.

An “inversion” happens when the Electoral College elects the Presidential candidate who loses the popular vote. New research shows that inversions are likely in future races.

To many voters, contemporary politics feels exceptional. Did an inversion happen in 2016 because it was an unusual election?

No: An inversion was likely in 2016 because 2016 was a close election. Not because we live in extraordinary political times, and not because of the particular candidates involved. A new study by the UTECS team shows that a pre-Civil War election as close in the national popular vote as 2016’s would have had a chance of an inversion just as large as 2016 — despite the fact that there would have been fewer states and different parties (and different demographics, voting laws, etc.). In 2020 and beyond, inversions will continue to be a statistically *normal* part of close elections in the Electoral College system.

Swing State Senarios

Inversion
Probability

Swing State Results

38%

New Hampshire: **R**
Pennsylvania: **D**
Wisconsin: **D**

40%

New Hampshire: **D**
Pennsylvania: **D**
Wisconsin: **D**

39%

New Hampshire: **R**
Pennsylvania: **R**
Wisconsin: **D**

39%

New Hampshire: **R**
Pennsylvania: **D**
Wisconsin: **R**

41%

New Hampshire: **D**
Pennsylvania: **R**
Wisconsin: **D**

39%

New Hampshire: **D**
Pennsylvania: **D**
Wisconsin: **R**

34%

New Hampshire: **R**
Pennsylvania: **R**
Wisconsin: **R**

38%

New Hampshire: **D**
Pennsylvania: **R**
Wisconsin: **R**

There are eight possible ways that the three swing states of New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin could vote in the Electoral College in any election in 2020 and beyond. For a future election that statistically resembles Presidential politics of the last 30 years, this table presents the probability of an inversion for each possible scenario in an election with a national popular vote margin within 2 million votes.

In close elections, inversions are normal — not exceptional.

Four inversions have happened in U.S. history. Inversions may seem like statistical flukes, but in fact they are likely whenever the popular vote is close. About 2 in 5 close elections will be inversions. If the popular vote had been close more often in US history, more inversions would have happened. And if future elections are as close as they have been in the last 30 years, inversions are very likely to happen again soon, including in 2020.

So far, every inversion has been a Republican victory. But UTECS analysis shows that if a Democratic candidate narrowly lost the popular vote, that candidate would be likely to win an inversion too.

Swing states decide elections, but what happens elsewhere determines the popular vote.

Swing states determine who wins the Electoral College. However, turnout and vote shares in non-swing states determine the national popular vote — and therefore determine whether or not an election is an inversion. To see this, the statistics on the left compute the chances of an inversion, for each possible scenario of how swing states vote. For example, if a generic Republican wins Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire, that Republican would be likely to win the Presidency — but how likely would a *inversion* be in such an election? If a Republican wins Wisconsin but loses Pennsylvania and New Hampshire, how likely is an inversion?

There are exactly eight possible Electoral College outcomes for three swing states. These statistics show that under *any* swing state scenario in this example, an inversion is likely in a close election within 2 million popular votes. So, when politicians and pundits analyze elections in 2020 and beyond, they will rightly concentrate on swing states, which will decide the President. But whether an *inversion* is likely depends on what is likely to happen across all 50 states plus DC.