

Martin Voting Power Index

Luther Martin was a Maryland delegate to the convention that drafted the U.S. Constitution in 1787. He was hostile to proposals that would substantially strengthen the central government and give larger states greater representation than smaller states. Martin left the convention before it had finished its work, and he subsequently opposed the ratification of the Constitution.

Martin delivered a report on the work of the Constitutional Convention to the Maryland State Legislature. In this report, which was also published as a pamphlet for use in the Antifederalist cause, Martin argued that “even if the States who had the most inhabitants ought to have the greatest number of delegates [to the proposed House of Representatives], yet the *number of delegates* ought not to be in *exact proportion* to the *number of inhabitants* because the influence and power of those states whose delegates are numerous will be *greater*, when compared to the influence and power of the other States, than the *proportion* which the numbers of their delegates bear to each other; as, for instance, though Delaware has *one* delegate, and Virginia but *ten*, yet Virginia has *more than ten times* as much *power and influence* in the government as Delaware.” Martin assumed that each state delegation would cast its votes as a bloc, and he went on to count up various voting combinations of states in order to support his claim. His objection to apportioning seats proportionally to population clearly anticipated one of the fundamental propositions of modern voting power analysis — namely, that *voting power* is not the same as *voting weight* (e.g., seats).

When William Riker discovered Martin’s argument, he thought it sufficiently insightful to be characterized as “the first power index,” though Martin never proposed a summary measure of voting power. Moreover, while voting power *may be* highly disproportional to voting weight, it *need not be* so and, under the provisional apportionment of House seats to which Martin referred, each state’s share of Banzhaf voting power is in fact closely aligned with its seat share. However, if Martin had focused on the two-stage voting power of *individual members* of the House, his objection would have been much better founded, as each of the ten Virginia members would have had more than two and half times the Banzhaf voting power of the lone Delaware member.

While Martin’s expectation that state delegations in the House would act as blocs was not borne out, state electoral votes (for President) would soon be cast in blocs, and the U.S. Electoral College has subsequently been one of the principal institutions to which voting power analysis has been applied.

References

- Martin, Luther. “The Genuine Information Delivered to the Legislature of the State of Maryland Relating to the Proceeding of the General Convention,” in Max Farand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (1937 rev. ed.), Vol. 3, Yale University Press, pp. 172-232.
- Riker, W. H. “The First Power Index,” *Social Choice and Welfare*, 3 (1986): 293-295.