Dear Mr. Mike Bostock and Mr. Shan Carter,

I am a computer science PhD student at the University of Maryland in College Park. I am taking the course “Information Visualization” this semester. As its first homework, I am writing a feedback about your visualization at (http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/10/15/us/politics/swing-history.html).

First of all, I would like to appreciate you for creating this interesting visualization. I chose your visualization because I find it more informative and easy to use. It shows the impact that each state had on the elections (size of the bar which means electoral voters), their position in the election with percentage, and these are shown historically and comparable among elections. Also the buttons that let the user see interesting facts by highlighting some states. The charts fit well, it is easy to scroll down, and scrolling down is the only thing needed to explore them which makes it simpler to learn and use by different types of users. Also, unlike many other visualizations it has enough instructions that makes everything so clear.

However, I have some suggestions that might improve this visualization. I think it could be really helpful if it was possible to highlight any set of arbitrary states. Like the one that happens after pressing the button “Highlight Tossups”. Also, it would be good if the user could change the color of highlighted states. Another idea could be to compare two elections that are not following each other in a better view. For instance, to have a comparison of elections 2012 and 2000 with hiding the information about the 2008 and 2004 elections. Moreover, it is hard to follow smaller states with current scale. A zoom option in these situations could be helpful. Also, to search some states a normal user would move around the bars carefully and slowly which could be time consuming. This can be solved by a search or select option for states. Considering the “Eight Golden Rules of Interface Design”, and specially the second and 8th rules which are named “Enable frequent users to use shortcuts” and “Reduce short-term memory load”, a user who is trying to research about a specific state (s) needs to do it more conveniently. I hope my suggestions above will help that happen.

Sincerely yours,
Milad Gholami