

# The Toulmin Argument Model



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Stephen Toulmin (*The Uses of Argument*, 1958), a British philosopher, is credited for developing a system of making practical arguments.

His argument system is based on justifying claims, and it involves analyzing your own argument from all sides to make it stronger. A Toulmin argument consists of the following components:

**THE CLAIM** – the statement or assertion the writer hopes to prove.

The claim must be controversial or debatable, or it is not an argument! Obvious facts do NOT work as claims.

- o **Example claim:** The Electoral College should be abolished.

**GROUND/EVIDENCE** – foundation that proves the claim.

- o **Example evidence:** The Electoral College gives small states undue influence.

**WARRANT** – logical and persuasive connection between a claim and the evidence.

The warrant is often left unstated, it provides the logic of why the evidence proves the claim. A strong warrant is one that is very difficult to disagree with. An argument with a weak warrant is easily disproven.

- o **Strong warrant example:**
  - **Claim/Evidence:** The Electoral College should be abolished because it gives small states undue influence.
  - **Strong Warrant:** No individual state(s) should have undue influence on presidential elections.
- o **Weak warrant example:**
  - **Claim/Evidence:** The legal age for drinking should be lowered since I've been drinking since age fourteen without problems.
  - **Weak Warrant:** What works for me should work for everyone else.

**BACKING** – the evidence supporting the warrant.

If the warrant is not fully convincing on its own, a strong backing is extra persuasion on your argument's side.

- o **Example backing:** Presidential candidates focus their campaigns on states with comparatively large electoral power and neglect many other states.

**REBUTTAL** – addressing potential objections/alternative viewpoints.

Acknowledging the opposition to your argument is a good way to show that you fully understand all sides of your claim. You can even then refute an objection to your claim, to make your argument even stronger. A rebuttal can contain two parts:

- o **Concession** – admitting of a point from the opposition; acknowledgement
  - **Example concession:** The Electoral College was created to ensure that presidential elections were limited to the main candidates instead of becoming chaotic.

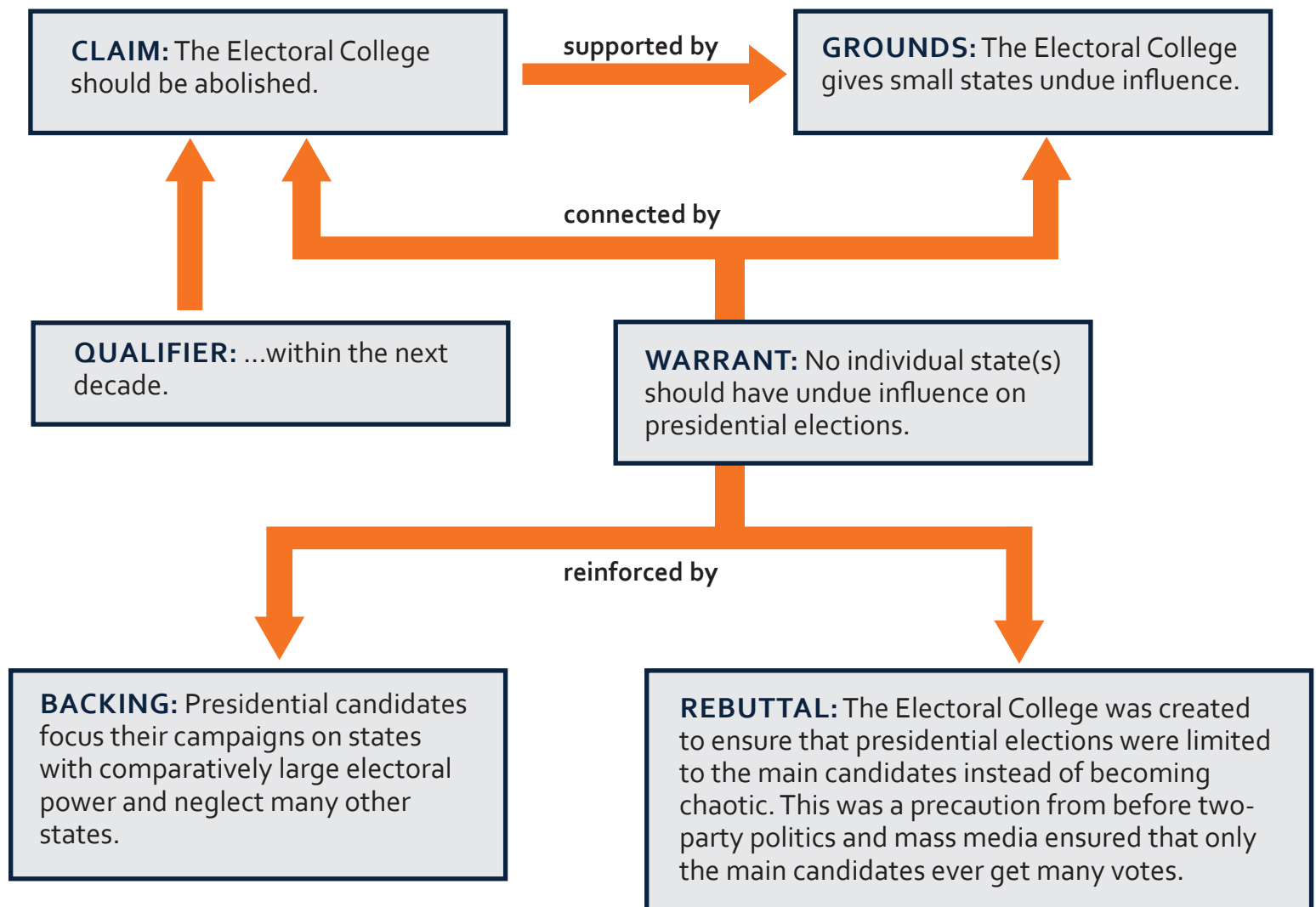
- o **Refutation** – addressing/countering the concession to prove your own point
  - **Example refutation:** This was a precaution from before two-party politics and mass media ensured that only the main candidates ever get many votes.

**QUALIFIERS** – words and phrases that place limits on claims.

If a claim in absolute terms would be too easy to dismiss, a qualifier shows that you're aware your claim isn't always valid. Some qualifiers: in some cases, under these conditions, possibly, routinely, etc.

- o **Unqualified claim:** People who meditate have better mental health.
- o **Qualified claim:** Many people who meditate find that it helps them manage their mental health.

## DIAGRAM OF THE TOULMIN ARGUMENT MODEL



Marshall, Teri. APSI 2018. St. Mary's Hall, 2018.

Lunsford, Andrea A., John J. Ruszkiewicz, and Keith Walters. Everything's an Argument. 7th ed. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016, pp. 130-142.