

The Map Inside the Election's Crystal Ball

—by David Miller

Election fever is gripping the Nation! Rather than just voice my opinion, I decided to use maps to predict the outcome of the 2008 election. I am delivering this article about three weeks before the election, so I might be surprised on Election Day.

When presidential elections occurred while I was teaching geography classes at Northern Virginia Community College or the Defense Intelligence Agency, I needed to stress the origin of electors in the U.S. Constitution, and how the Electoral College helps our federal system by giving the states power in presidential elections. In essence, our votes count at the state level, not the national level. I would challenge my students to predict the vote based upon demographics and past votes. The winners would get National Geographic atlases.

Some brief basics about presidential elections. The 538 electors in the Electoral College determine the President of the United States. The number of electors for each state matches the number of senators and representatives sent by the state to the U.S. Congress, with the exception of 3 votes allotted to the District of Columbia. A presidential candidate needs 270 votes to win—a majority of 538. Electors usually vote for the candidate who won the most votes in their respective state, because the electors represent the voters. The winner of the popular vote in a state gets all the electoral votes, with the exception of Maine and Nebraska, which split their votes based on congressional districts.

So, here is where the fun begins. The map with my predictions is based on the voting trends and the current demographics of each state. I also provide a brief geographic analysis for some of the battleground or swing states.

Yes, based on the map, Barack Obama will win 365 electoral votes and will become president. This is not an easy prediction for someone who went to Ronald Reagan's inaugural ball in 1981 (as a very young Republican); but after decades in Washington, I look at elections more objectively. At this time (mid-October), general trends help Mr. Obama and Democrats:

- The economic crisis does not favor Republicans;
- Deficit spending and unpopular wars hurt Republicans;
- New voter registrations favor Democrats;
- Democrats enjoy a fund-raising advantage this election;
- Previously Republican southern states are vulnerable.

Before dealing with battleground states (labeled on map), I must commit to what I think are safe states for Mr. Obama.

All the states that went for Al Gore in 2000 are safe for Barack Obama, including Iowa and New Mexico. The power of incumbency caused these two states to tilt slightly in George Bush's favor in 2004, but John McCain does not have that advantage. Some people list Pennsylvania as a battleground state; I think it is safe for the Democrats due to past trends and the current economy. Also, I predict New Hampshire will go to the Democrats in 2008, as it did in 2004, due to general trends and a Senate race that favors Democrats.

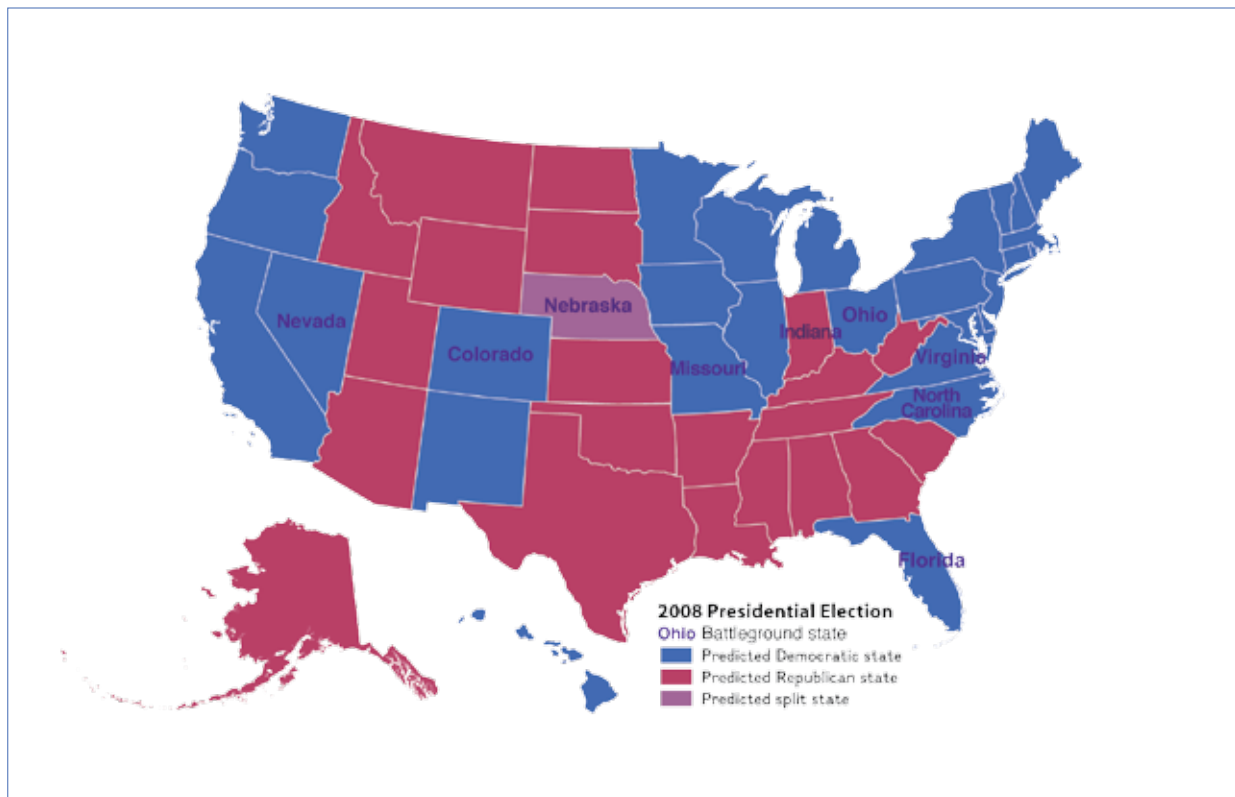
It is important to note that if the Obama team holds the above states, then they need only 6 more electoral votes to win. Colorado or Virginia would put them over the top—they would not need Florida or Ohio.

BATTLEGROUND STATES

Florida: 27 electoral votes. Florida voted for Jimmy Carter in 1976 and Bill Clinton in 1996 but has otherwise gone Republican. However, since the highly contested 2000 election, Florida has grown by more than 2.2 million people, many going to the southern Florida counties of Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach. These three counties contain about 30% of Florida's people. Mr. Obama will have a landslide victory in these counties, and other urban counties, and win Florida—provided that there are enough voting machines, and that they work well. Florida to Obama.

Ohio: 20 electoral votes. Ohio went to Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996, then to George Bush in 2000 and 2004. Republicans are strongest in southwestern counties, such as Cincinnati's Hamilton County. But economic issues will help Obama take Ohio, winning big margins in northern and eastern counties that include Cleveland and Toledo. He will also pick up Franklin County (Columbus) and Montgomery County (Dayton). The state has a popular Democratic governor, Ted Strickland—and an unpopular former Republican governor, Bob Taft, recently convicted of breaking state ethics laws. Ohio to Obama.

North Carolina: 15 electoral votes. In early October, polls show that Obama and McCain are tied in the Tar Heel state. North Carolina's large rural and urban black population will go to Mr. Obama, and so will the cities of Durham and Charlotte (Mecklenburg County). However, Raleigh (Wake



County) is the key, and the Obama campaign needs a large margin in Wake County to offset traditionally Republican counties in the southeast and west. It will be very close. North Carolina to Obama.

Virginia: 13 electoral votes. Virginia has not gone to Democrats in a presidential election since 1964, but general trends favor them this year. Voter registration is way up in traditionally Democratic counties. Mr. Obama should win big in Northern Virginia counties, including Fairfax County with over one million people. Downstate, he will take the urban areas of Hampton Roads, as well as Charlottesville and Richmond. Popular Democratic Governor Tim Kaine and Senator Jim Webb should bring in votes statewide for Mr. Obama. Virginia to Obama.

Missouri: 11 electoral votes. Considered a bellwether state, Missouri has picked the winner in every presidential election but one in the last 104 years. Missouri went to Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996, then to George Bush in 2000 and 2004. Mr. Obama should benefit from the Midwest effect (being from neighboring Illinois) and win the northern counties and those bordering Illinois. He should also win St. Louis and Kansas City by large margins. Democratic Senator Claire McCaskill campaigns for Mr. Obama, but Republican Gover-

nor Matt Blunt, son of House Republican Whip Roy Blunt, supports Mr. McCain. However, the current governor's race favors Democrats. Missouri to Obama.

Indiana: 11 electoral votes. The economy and the Midwest effect put this traditionally Republican state into play. Indiana's population is older and less ethnically diverse than the national average. The Obama campaign can expect to win counties bordering Illinois and the Ohio River, as well as populous Marion County (Indianapolis). However, this will not be enough to offset the rest of the state. Indiana to McCain.

Colorado: 9 electoral votes. This state went to Mr. Clinton in 1992, but has gone Republican in the last three presidential elections—by narrow margins. Mr. Obama will take Denver, Boulder, and southern counties near the New Mexico border. Colorado has been trending well for the Democrats, with a new Democratic senator and governor. The current senate race is close but favors Democratic candidate Mark Udall. However, it is a close race, and Ralph Nader being on the ballot could make it closer. Colorado to Obama.

Nevada: 5 electoral votes. The Democrats won this state in 1992 and 1996, but lost it in 2000 and 2004. The one

reliable Democratic county in Nevada is Clark County (Las Vegas)—it holds 70% of the state’s population and is one of the nation’s fastest-growing areas. Nevada to Obama.

Nebraska: 5 electoral votes. As stated before, Nebraska splits its electoral vote, and Obama’s campaign is targeting the 2nd Congressional District’s one electoral vote. The district is dominated by Omaha’s Douglas County, which has a large minority population. Nebraska’s retiring Republican senator, Chuck Hagel, has defended Mr. Obama against attacks from the McCain campaign. Nebraska: 4 votes to McCain; 1 vote to Obama.

In summary, the political chessboard has Mr. McCain on the defensive, with way too many wavering red states to defend and not enough pieces. As I was finishing this article, the red states of Kentucky, West Virginia, Montana, and North Dakota were on the verge of becoming battlegrounds. So in mid-October, it appears that Mr. Obama will win big in November; but politics (like cartography) is an art as well as a science—and the political landscape can change in an instant based upon the passions of the moment.

