

Predicting the Election Map

The morning after and more

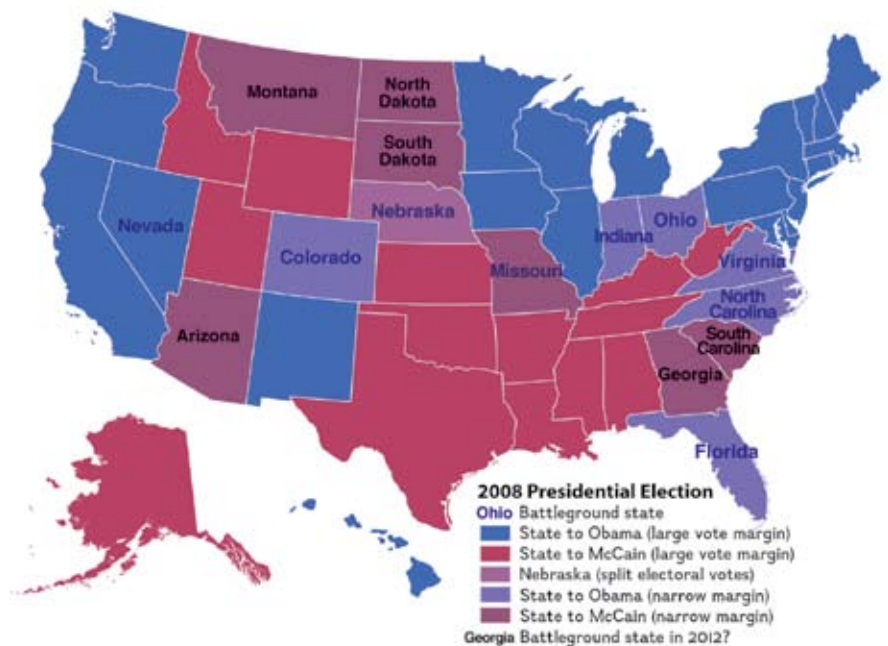
—by David Miller

Election day, November 4, 2008, was wild in Virginia—in a good way. Everyone was excitedly planning their day around voting, but the long lines of 2000 and 2004 gave way to no lines, due to dedicated election officials and many more voting machines. I even had a choice of using electronic touch screens or paper ballots to record my vote, although, it seemed strange to witness the return of the paper ballot in the 21st century. After voting, I monitored the election returns until late into the night to see whether my state predictions in the November 2008 *ACSM Bulletin* were on the mark, or blown out of the water.

Happily, only two states defied my predictions: Indiana and Missouri. Based on demographics and voting trends, I thought Indiana would go for John McCain and Missouri for Barack Obama. However, Indiana went to Mr. Obama by a narrow margin of some 28,000 votes out of 2.8 million votes cast. Missouri, the last state to give a final tally, declared in late November that Mr. McCain won by 3,632 votes out of 2.9 million cast.

This notwithstanding, because both states have 11 electoral votes, I was right in predicting that Barack Obama would get 365 electoral votes (versus 173 for John McCain)—although, the number of electoral votes is not official until electors meet “the first Monday following the second Wednesday in December.” This year, the Electoral College met on December 15.

Electors are usually party loyalists and vote according to the state vote; occasionally they break their pledge and become “Faithless Electors.” For example, in 2004, one Minnesota elector voted for John Edwards for Presi-



dent—instead of Democratic Party nominee John Kerry (more on electors at www.archives.gov).

Why did Indiana go to Barack Obama?

Indiana has not voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1964, but Mr. Obama’s success followed classic political geography strategy:

- Barack Obama visited Indiana 49 times; John McCain came only 3 times.
- Michigan resources shifted to Indiana (in October), which helped staff 44 Obama field offices.
- Obama offices in Republican counties, such as Hamilton, increased his share of the vote.
- Voter registration drives produced more Democratic votes, especially in Lake County.

- Obama mobilized universities, twice visiting Indiana University’s 40,000-student campus.
- Obama’s campaign won court battles for early voting centers in Democratic areas.

In the 2008 presidential election, every county in Indiana went a little (or a lot) more Democratic than in previous elections. Comparing 2004 and 2008 election results, no other state saw a greater shift in votes to the Democratic candidate than Indiana.

Why did Missouri go to John McCain?

For only the second time in 104 years, Missouri did not vote for the winning presidential candidate. True, Missouri was wrong by only 3,632 votes, but why? First of all, one needs to under-

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Victory for America

by Robert Barnes and Michael D. Shear

Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois was elected the nation's 44th president on Nov. 4th, riding a reformist message of change and an inspirational exhortation of hope to become the first African American to ascend to the White House.

Standing before a crowd of more than 125,000 people who had waited for hours at Chicago's Grant Park, Obama acknowledged the accomplishment and the dreams of his supporters.

"If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer," he said just before midnight Eastern time.

"The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even one term, but America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you: We as a people will get there."

The historic Election Day brought millions of new and sometimes tearful voters, long lines at polling places nationwide, and celebrations on street corners and in front of the White House. "This is an historic election, and I recognize the special significance it has for

stand that Missouri is part Midwestern and part Southern, with the Missouri River as a dividing line. The South is the bastion of the Republican Party in the U.S., and southern Missouri is quite Republican, including Rush Limbaugh's hometown of Cape Girardeau.

For Democrats, St. Louis, Kansas City, and northern Missouri counties are normally Democratic. John McCain won Missouri due to the following factors:

- Obama visits and resources were more limited here, compared to Indiana.
- Traditionally Democratic northern Missouri counties went to McCain.
- Northern counties have a high elderly population, a demographic favorable to McCain.
- McCain increased his offices by a third in October and sent Sarah Palin to the state three times.
- Palin rallied Republicans and attracted conservative Democrats throughout Missouri.
- There was no early voting in Missouri, often seen as beneficial to Democrats.



African Americans and the special pride that must be theirs tonight," said John McCain, Obama's Republican opponent.

Obama became the first Democrat since Jimmy Carter in 1976 to receive more than 50 percent of the popular vote, and he made good on his pledge to transform the electoral map.

He is the fifth-youngest man elected to a first presidential term, after Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton, and Ulysses S. Grant. He is the 16th senator to ascend to the office, and the first since Kennedy's election in 1960.

The election map and the geopolitical patterns

The results of this election will shape future elections. Looking at the map, once reliable Republican states, like Arizona, may become battleground states. The splitting of Nebraska's electoral vote (4 to McCain and 1 to Obama) may encourage other states to split their electoral votes. Finally, the number of states won in 2008 by large vote margins favors Democrats: Obama got 22 states and D.C. for 269 electoral votes (one short of the 270 needed to win); McCain had only 15 states for 121 electoral votes. Safe states for Republicans seem to be shrinking.

The future?

The 2010 elections will witness a test of Barack Obama's election strategy of courting red state populations. Will vulnerable Republican Senate seats in Arizona, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, and Ohio fall to Democrats in 2010? Will President Obama win more red states in a 2012 re-election bid? The map looks promising at this point. ■

David Miller is a senior editor at National Geographic Maps.

President Bush, who called Obama at 11:12 p.m. to offer his congratulations, said, according to the White House: "Mr. President-elect, congratulations to you. What an awesome night for you, your family, and your supporters."

Hillary Rodham Clinton, Obama's one-time rival who worked hard for his election toward the end, said: "We are celebrating an historic victory for the American people. This was a long and hard-fought campaign, but the result was well worth the wait." ■

[Photo, left top corner: Barack Obama with daughter Malia before addressing Americans from Chicago's Grant Park]