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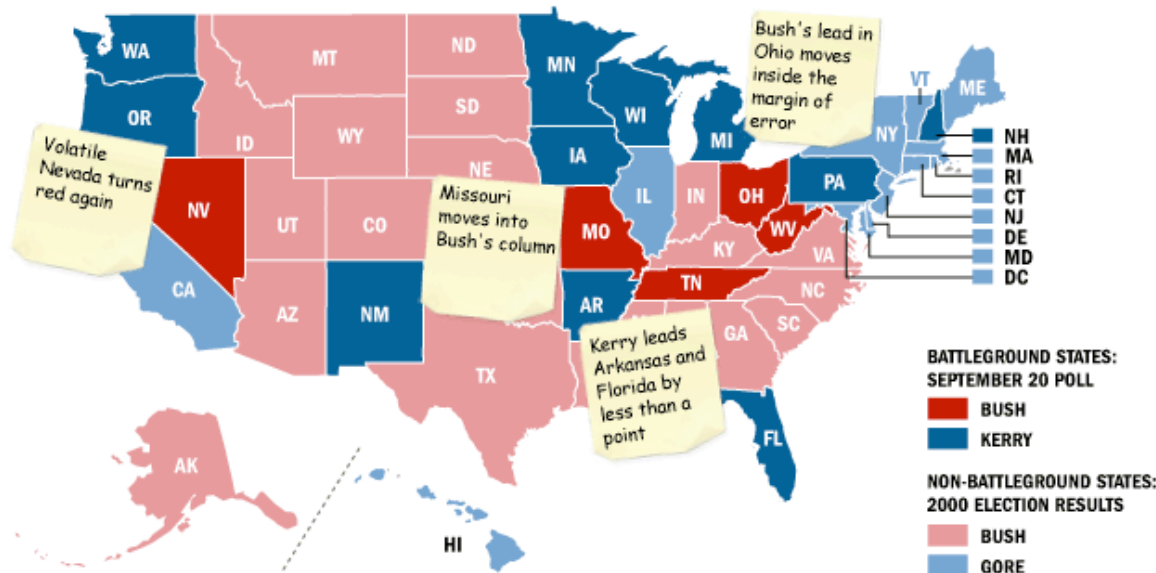


BATTLEGROUND STATES POLL

Analysis of Past Polls...

Run the Numbers: A Tight Race in Every Way

A look at how the results of the latest Battleground poll by Zogby Interactive could play out on Election Day.



SEPTEMBER 20, 2004

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President Bush has picked up some more ground in his tight race against Sen. John Kerry, but there are also signs of resilience in the Kerry campaign.

The latest Zogby Interactive poll of 16 battleground states shows Mr. Kerry ahead in 11 states, one state fewer than in a poll taken during the Republican convention two weeks earlier. Because Mr. Kerry's lead is thin in several states, including Florida, where the candidates remain less than a percentage point apart, the race is even closer than 11-5 state tally depicts.

Let's run the numbers.

To recap, in analyzing Zogby's results, we begin by assuming that the District of Columbia and the 34 states that aren't in the battleground poll will vote for the same political party this November as they did in the 2000 election. (That assumption has become less firm since Mr. Bush picked up strength following the Republican convention. More on that later.) Thus, in our analysis, Mr. Bush starts with 189 electoral votes, while Mr. Kerry begins with 172. To win the White House, a candidate must capture 270 electoral votes.

From that starting point, we add in the electoral votes from the latest poll, regardless of the margin of error or the spread between the candidates. Mr. Kerry's 11 states control 125 votes, while Mr. Bush's five states have 52. Thus, if the results on Election Day match the findings of the Zogby poll, Mr. Kerry would win, 297-241.

That 56-electoral-vote spread is the narrowest we've found in our battlegrounds analyses since late July, just before the start of the Democratic convention.

If you take away the states with the narrowest spreads between the candidates, things are even tighter. Excluding Florida and Arkansas, which Mr. Kerry leads by less than one point, the senator's lead is 264-241, with 33 electoral votes up for grabs. Taking away four states where fewer than three points separate the candidates, Mr. Kerry is ahead 254-236, with 48 votes up for grabs.

Still, there are signs that Mr. Kerry is gaining back some of the strength that was sapped during the Republican convention. In the latest poll, Mr. Kerry gained ground on the president in nine states, while Mr. Bush improved his standing in six. In one state, Wisconsin, there was no change in the margin between the candidates.

Mr. Bush lost some ground in the crucial Ohio race; his lead there had been greater than the margin of error in the prior two polls. This time, Mr. Bush was ahead by 3.3 percentage points, which is within

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the margin of error. Mr. Kerry's position improved a bit in Pennsylvania. That state, which had been solidly in his column before the Republican convention, gave the senator a 3.1 point lead, up from 2.8 points.

And, Mr. Kerry has made more progress than Mr. Bush in solidifying his support in the battlegrounds that the Democrats won in 2000. The senator's lead is greater than the margin of error in five of the eight battlegrounds that Al Gore won. Mr. Bush's lead is greater than the margin of error in just one of the eight battlegrounds he won last election.

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Of course, all of this math is predicated on the nonbattleground states voting the same way this time as last -- and that has become less certain in recent weeks. In New Jersey, for instance, which Mr. Gore won in 2000 and which had been considered solidly for Mr. Kerry, a survey of likely voters conducted Sept. 12-14 by SurveyUSA found Mr. Bush ahead by four points.

Among other states the Democrats carried by comfortable margins in 2000: In Maine, a Zogby telephone poll of likely voters Sept. 9 found the candidates tied; and in New York, a Quinnipiac University poll of registered voters Sept. 7-12 found the president just six points behind Mr. Kerry. A month earlier, Mr. Kerry had an 18-point lead in that poll.

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