

Why Gore Was Not Strongly Favored in the Electoral College Under a Dead Heat Popular Vote

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Consistent with many other observers, we predicted in *A Dead Heat and the Electoral College* that if the popular vote in 2000 were a virtual dead heat, then the Electoral College advantage would go to Gore. Bush would need more popular vote than Gore to win. The popular vote was a dead heat, but Gore won no such advantage. Why did this prediction go wrong?

The prediction of a Gore edge was based largely on the premise that throughout the campaign Gore would make a better showing in the polls in the crucial battleground states than in the national polls. In other words, the national polls were not a good measure of Gore's Electoral strength in the place where the election would be decided. If the national polls were to be a tie, then Gore would lead in the battleground states. With massive battleground—state polling, Gore's extrapolated state leads would translate into near-certain state victories and a hence a near-certain Electoral College triumph.

What went wrong? The crucial assumption was that the partisan trend be uniform. A two-point gain nationally, for example, would translate into two more points in Gore states, in Bush states, and in battleground states — all together uniformly. This assumption of uniform swing was wrong. Instead, the Gore gain from October 31 (interpolated from state polls) and election day was as follows:

Safe Bush states	Gore +3.19% of two-party vote.
Battleground states	Gore +1.30%
Safe Gore states	Gore +2.98%

Clearly, Gore gained most where he needed it least. The final vote in the battleground states was in line with our expectation given a 48.8 Gore -51.2 Bush national vote division. At that value, the expectation would be more like a dead heat in the Electoral College.

We suspect that in the battleground states, where voters were bombarded with campaign information, voters figured out how to vote early. Others (in the safe Bush and safe Gore states) had to decide in an information vacuum, and their late decisions went to Gore.