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The 2016 Race

The Upshot

50 Years of Electoral College Maps: How the U.S. Turned Red and Blue

By TONI MONKOVIC

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The beginnings of the blue-red regional alignment in today's American politics can be traced to 1964, when Republicans broke through in the South after almost 100 **years** of Democratic domination.

We've included a chart of that **Electoral** College map and the 12 others since then, along with a brief guided tour. What were your election-night memories of watching the maps below take shape? Share them in the comment section, and we'll publish a selection of the best ones before Election Day in November.

1964 Understanding the history of modern American politics means having to reckon with the issue of race. Because of the Democrats' embrace of the civil rights movement, the 1964 election was the first since the 1870s in which the Republicans won most of the Deep South. Barry Goldwater of Arizona was routed by Lyndon Johnson, but besides winning his home state, Mr. Goldwater took Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Mississippi and Louisiana.

(The 1948 map was also [a foreshadowing](#), with Strom Thurmond taking several Southern states as a third-party candidate, mining Southerners' anger over President Truman's support of [civil rights](#)).

1968 Richard Nixon continued the G.O.P.'s courting of Southern whites, taking advantage of racial resentment (the so-called [Southern strategy](#)). But Mr. Nixon didn't win most of Goldwater's Southern states from 1964. George Wallace, running a segregationist campaign, did, capturing five Southern states as an independent candidate.

Mr. Nixon overperformed in the **Electoral** College (winning, 301-191) relative to his narrow victory in the popular vote over Hubert Humphrey (by less than one percentage point). In the election's aftermath, Congress considered whether the **Electoral** College should be replaced by the popular vote, with President Nixon supporting the idea initially. The effort, probably the most serious attempt to end the **Electoral** College system, was defeated mainly by Southern politicians from smaller states concerned about losing influence.

1972 This was the fulfillment of the Southern strategy, although Mr. Nixon hardly needed it. The early [Watergate stories](#) didn't make a dent as George McGovern won only one state and the District of Columbia.

Massachusetts, home of the Kennedys, was the outlier state, cultivating its liberal reputation. In the next few decades, two Massachusetts politicians emerged as Democratic presidential nominees (Michael Dukakis in 1988 and John Kerry in 2004); two emerged as main contenders for the nomination (Ted Kennedy in 1980 and Paul Tsongas in 1992); and one emerged as the Republican nominee (Mitt Romney in 2012), with some Republicans believing he was too liberal or moderate.

1976 This map is not like the others: Democrats once again dominated the South. How did they do it? Some unusual circumstances: Watergate, of course, and Gerald Ford's [pardon](#) of Mr. Nixon. The fact that Jimmy Carter was a Southerner didn't hurt. Most Southern voters were still registered Democrats. The election was unusual in another way: It was the only one won by Democrats from 1968 to 1992.

1980 Mr. Carter held his home state, Georgia, but few others. West Virginia was still considered a Democratic bastion and remained so through the 1996 election.

This map reasserted the trend, begun in 1964, of Republican gains in the South (fitting, as Mr. Goldwater was viewed as the forefather of Ronald Reagan's conservative revolution).

1984 Oh, the loneliness of Minnesota, the home of the Democratic nominee Walter Mondale. The state has voted Democratic in every election but one (1972) since 1956, making it the most loyal Democratic state since then. Only the District of Columbia has given the Democrats a longer winning streak. But Minnesota is no longer considered a slam-dunk blue state, the way Vermont, Hawaii and California now are, for example. The Democrats won by only a few percentage points in Minnesota in 2000 and 2004.

1988 Even though this turned out to be an easy victory for Republicans, you can faintly discern an element of the blue-red regional divide that prevailed in later decades. Washington and Oregon turned blue — and have stayed that way. The shift of the West Coast to Democratic control was underway.

1992 This map is probably the most significant one since the 1960s in terms of partisan realignment. Democrats, in the wilderness since their last White House victory in 1976 with Carter, turned to another Southern governor, Bill Clinton of Arkansas. He ran as a more moderate Democrat, and he and his running mate, Al Gore of Tennessee, proved to have greater appeal among Southern and Appalachian whites.

California joined Washington and Oregon in the blue column, and the Northeast and Upper Midwest mostly solidified as Democratic states.

Ross Perot won 18.9 percent of the vote but no **Electoral** College votes. And contrary to some received wisdom, he [did not cost](#) George H.W. Bush the election.

1996 This map is similar to the 1992 version. It was the last blue turn for Appalachia and for some Southern states along the Mississippi River. Appalachian states are expected [to be strengths](#) for Donald Trump this November. As my colleague Nate Cohn [wrote in 2014](#): "Democrats have suffered huge losses in these areas over the last decade and a half. Al Gore's environmentalism and Clinton-era regulations, along with cultural issues like gun control, combined to cut into the Democratic advantage."

2000 The focus has understandably been on the Florida recount and on Mr. Gore's fruitless popular vote victory. But he also came very close in New Hampshire — a victory there would have put him over the top in the **Electoral** College.

Mr. Gore also won several very close contests — in Wisconsin, Iowa and Oregon (by less than half a percentage point in each) — and a desperately close one in New Mexico. As The Associated Press [wrote](#) in 2000, "Al Gore won a 481-vote squeaker Friday in New Mexico, the closest presidential race in the country outside of Florida, following a series of clerical blunders and a flip-flopped lead that kept the race in limbo for 10 days."

2004 A sea of red, but looks can be deceiving. Had Mr. Kerry won Ohio, he would have become president. He didn't lose it by much. Had some 60,000 Ohioans switched their votes, he would have won through the **Electoral** College despite losing the popular vote by more than two percentage points. If Hillary Clinton wins in November, Democrats will have won the popular vote in six of seven elections, this one being the exception.

2008 The rout was so complete that Barack Obama even won Indiana, one of the most reliably Republican states. In several elections, such as Democratic victories in 1992 and 1996, Indiana remained red despite being surrounded by a sea of blue. Mr. Obama beat John McCain by one percentage point there, then lost Indiana in 2012. Indiana is expected to vote for Mr. Trump this November.

2012 In his keynote address at the Democratic convention in 2004, Mr. Obama said, "The pundits like to slice and dice our country into red states and blue states," and urged Americans to rally around "the United States." But this map was further confirmation that red-blue divides had congealed. It was essentially a repeat of the Obama 2008 victory map, minus Indiana and North Carolina.

Democratic victories in Virginia and Colorado for the second straight cycle suggested a shift in those two states, and polling this year has confirmed it, giving Mrs. Clinton [many more ways to win the 2016 election](#) than Mr. Trump.

Postscript

Race wasn't the only reason for realignments, of course. Among other issues at play in this era were the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the invasion of Iraq; cultural divides on gun rights, school prayer, abortion; social movements like feminism and gay rights; economic differences on matters like taxes and trade.

But race was the major reason [the South flipped](#). Exit polling suggests that no Democratic presidential nominee has won 51 percent of white voters since 1964.

In 2005, Ken Mehlman, the Republican National Committee chairman, [apologized](#) for the Southern strategy: "Some Republicans gave up on winning the African-American vote, looking the other way or trying to benefit politically from racial polarization. I am here today as the Republican chairman to tell you we were wrong."

Nevertheless, the current G.O.P. nominee, Mr. Trump, [is polling](#) at around 1 to 2 percent among African-Americans.

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