In 2016, **12 [states](#) and two congressional districts** were key to deciding the outcome of the presidential election between [Hillary Clinton](#) and [Donald Trump](#).[1] In electoral votes, that came to **159**, more than half of the **270 votes** needed to win an electoral college majority and become president. Throughout 2016, polling was often tight in these states and districts, and their voting histories made their outcomes difficult to predict. For these reasons, we referred to them as "battlegrounds."

Why did these states have so much sway in the election?

The reason these states and two districts had so much sway in the 2016 presidential election was largely because most of the electoral college map was already set in place before any votes for president were cast, but the battleground states were still up for grabs. [Clinton](#), for example, began the general election with an *almost guaranteed* **200 electoral votes** from 16 states and Washington, D.C. That's **74 percent** of the **270** electoral votes needed to win. [Trump](#) began with an *almost guaranteed* **179** electoral votes—**66 percent** of **270**—from 22 states. We knew this because of these states' past election results, demographic trends, and polling data. What this means is that 38 states and [Washington, D.C.](#)—a total of **379 electoral votes**—were not competitive in 2016. But the battleground states were, and there were more than enough electoral votes between them to get either candidate to the White House.

Paths to victory

Clinton needed slightly fewer of these battleground states' electoral votes than Trump. To win, she needed only **70** of the **159 electoral votes** in the battlegrounds, while Trump needed **91**. Those 21 electoral votes that separated Clinton and Trump might not sound all that significant, but they were. Ballotpedia broke down all the different **combinations of battleground states** that could get Clinton and Trump to **270 electoral votes** or higher. **We found that Clinton had almost twice as many paths to victory as Trump, at 10,581 different combinations to 5,572, respectively.** The 2016 battleground states are highlighted on the map below in grey. Maine and Nebraska are yellow because their second congressional districts were battlegrounds.[1] States in blue and red are ones that were generally considered safe for Clinton and Trump, respectively.

What happened with the battleground states in the election?

The states that Ballotpedia identified as "almost guaranteed" turned out to be correct. Clinton won **200 electoral votes** from **16 states and Washington, D.C.** Trump won **179 electoral votes** from **22 states**. With the battlegrounds, Clinton ended up winning **four states**—**32 electoral votes**—while Trump won **seven states** and the second congressional districts of Maine and Nebraska, a total of **111 electoral votes**. In other words, he won about **70 percent** of the electoral votes available in battleground states. Trump's battleground states were Arizona, Iowa, Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Florida. Clinton's were Colorado, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Virginia. As of November 9, 2016, Michigan remained too close to call. Crucial to Trump's victory were Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. Both of these states were part of Clinton's so-called "firewall," a group of six states also including Colorado, Michigan, Virginia, and New Hampshire that were thought to guarantee her a path to 270.