

# Third Way's Election Night Guide



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Third Way's Election Night Guide is designed to equip you with the information you need to assess who is winning as the results roll in on November 8. This brief explainer describes key indicators to watch throughout the day and into the night. With political analysts and pundits using so many different data points as evidence for their electoral predictions, an objective look at the numbers will give you the context to make your own judgements. Our guide is organized in three parts:

1. **Poll Closing & Declaring Winners:** This section lists the official poll closing times for each state. Drawing upon historical data, we estimate when presidential victors for each state are likely to be named and the potential consequences of a later or earlier than average declaration.
2. **Bellwether Counties:** Here we provide background on historic bellwethers and some the metrics we will be looking at in key counties throughout the night.

3. **Demographic Trends** in the Exit Polls: The last section of the guide focuses on the demographic turnout and voting patterns in the national Exit Polls and key indicators based upon historical presidential voting coalitions.

Finally, here are cheat sheets that you can use to keep your own tabulations on the presidential and Senate races as results stream in throughout the evening.



**Presidential Cheat Sheet**



**Senate Cheat Sheet**

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## #1: Poll Closing & Declaring Winners

### Overview

All times are Eastern Time. Some states have multiple time zones. Generally the major news outlets will not call a race until all polls close in that state, even if the majority of polls close in an earlier time zone.

7:00 pm: Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia

7:30 pm: North Carolina, Ohio, West Virginia

8:00 pm: Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, DC, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee

8:30 pm: Arkansas

9:00 pm: Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Wisconsin, Wyoming

10:00 pm: Iowa, Montana, Nevada, Utah

11:00 pm: California, Hawaii, Idaho, Oregon, Washington

1:00 am: Alaska

## **What to Watch**

If Trump loses Florida and Pennsylvania, he very likely has no path to 270 electoral votes, even if he wins Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, and Wisconsin. As the major media outlets call the race in the states, here are some key times to note based on recent presidential elections:

- **Florida:** It is difficult to say when the election will be called in Florida. In 2008 Florida was called after 11:00 pm but in 2012 it was so close that election results weren't available for four days after Election Day.
- **Georgia:** If Georgia isn't called for Trump by 9:30pm, this points to a very tight race in what has been a safe Republican state for the past five elections.
- **Indiana:** If Indiana isn't called by 8:00pm, then the state is closer than analysts expected and should point to a good night for Democrats.
- **Michigan:** If Michigan isn't called around closing time (9:00 pm EST), the state is closer than analysts expected and could indicate Trump is beating expectations.
- **Missouri:** If Missouri isn't called by midnight, then the state is closer than analysts expected and should point to a good night for Democrats.
- **New Hampshire:** Don't be surprised if this is called late. In 2012, New Hampshire wasn't called for President Obama until almost 10:00pm, three hours after the polls closed in this tiny state.
- **North Carolina:** North Carolina tends to be called late, whether a Democrat (Obama 2008) or a Republican (Romney 2012) wins it.

- **Pennsylvania:** If Pennsylvania isn't called by 9:30, then the state is closer than analysts expected and could point to a Trump surge.

## #2: Bellwether Counties

### Overview

Analyses of U.S. presidential elections often look for geographic voting patterns over successive elections, creating a bunch of so-called “bellwethers”—that is, the kinds of places with a long track record of supporting the victor. These are based on historical observations. While some pundits may hold them up as a matter of fact—e.g., whoever wins Ohio wins the White House—it is better to think of them as historic benchmarks. If historic voting patterns continue, then analysts will be looking at how the results from 2016 compare to these trends:

- **Vigo County, Indiana:** Voted for the winner in every presidential election since 1888 with two exceptions (1908, 1952).
- **Ohio:** Since 1960, no candidate of either party has won the White House without carrying Ohio.
- **Nevada:** Voted for the winner in every presidential election since 1912, with one exception (1976).
- **Missouri:** Historically a bellwether state, some think Missouri lost that status in 2008 when Sen. McCain won by about 4,000 votes.

### What to Watch

Here are a few of the key counties to watch on Election Night:

- **Hillsborough County, Florida:** No candidate has won Florida without winning Hillsborough County since 1960. In 2012, President Obama won 53% of the more than half a million votes cast there.

- **Clark County, Nevada:** About two-thirds of Nevada's 2012 presidential votes were in Clark County, where President Obama won 56% of the vote.
- **Hillsborough County, New Hampshire:** Voted twice for W. Bush and twice for President Obama, this has the largest population of any county in New Hampshire.
- **Stark County, Ohio:** Since 1960, Stark County has been the most predictive county within Ohio, with eventual statewide winners losing the county only three times since 1960 (most recently in 2004). Less than half a percent separated President Obama and Mitt Romney here in 2012.
- **Bucks County, Pennsylvania:** A Philadelphia suburb and home to a competitive House race, Bucks County contains both moderate Republicans—whom Trump is expected to lose—and white working class voters—whom Trump is trying to appeal to.
- **Brown County, Wisconsin:** Famous as the home of the Green Bay Packers, Brown County tilts center-right, voting for a Republican for president in three of the past four elections (Obama won in 2008). Trump lost Brown County by 13 points during the primary, the same margin as his statewide loss to Sen. Cruz.

## #3: Demographic Trends in the Exit Polls

### Overview

Exit poll data released on Election Night should be viewed as preliminary. Generally, the exit polls are adjusted (re-weighted) after the final vote. And the early exits released during Election Day are even more suspect (ask President Kerry). But this data provides useful trends among different groups.

### What to Watch

On Election Night, here are a few points to watch:

- **Ideology:** Moderates have been a plurality of voters, outnumbering liberals and conservatives, in every presidential election for the past forty years. We will be looking at both their size and how Clinton performs. If she is under 56%, that spells trouble. If she is between 56% and 59%, she could win but we'll wait and see. Historically, no Democrat had won the White House without 60% of moderate voters until President Obama won in 2012 with 56% (that year, there was a larger share of liberals than in prior elections). If Clinton is winning 60% or more of moderates, she will likely win.
- **Race & Ethnicity:** The expectation is that the national electorate will be 70% non-Hispanic white and 30% Hispanic and nonwhite. If there are more whites than expected, that could spell trouble for Clinton.
- **Education:** Historically, Republican presidential candidates have won whites, including whites with a college degree. However, Trump's candidacy may upend that tradition. While Clinton is expected to lose whites without a college degree, perhaps by as much as 50 points (25% for Clinton to 75% for Trump), Clinton is currently leading in the polls among whites with a college degree. If she pulls even among college whites, we expect her to win the national popular vote.
- **Gender:** Men tilt Republican and women almost always vote Democrat in presidential elections. President Obama won women by 13 and 11 points in his two presidential elections. If Clinton is winning women by double digits and close to a tie among men, we expect her to have a good night.

#### TOPICS

