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How Hillary Clinton's Map Advantage Could Shift Towards Trump

By Matt A. Mayer

The conventional wisdom is that Hillary Clinton will crush Donald Trump in the November election. As I [detailed previously](#), a generic Democratic candidate begins the general election with a huge Electoral College advantage based on how states have voted in the last six presidential elections. The count in September 2015 stood at 257 electoral votes for the Democrat and 206 electoral votes for the Republican, with five battleground states worth 75 electoral votes.

Where is the race today as we near the end of the primary process? Based on current polling and primary results, Clinton likely would win the presidency with 284 electoral votes to Trump's 248 electoral votes, with only Nevada as too tough to call. Clinton's win would be the closest win for a Democrat since Woodrow Wilson's 23-vote victory exactly 100 years ago in 1916.

Voters Really Don't Like Hillary

Why so close a victory? Bluntly, voters don't like her very much. Even though Trump's unfavorable numbers also are high, he is not as familiar a political candidate as Clinton. In short, unlike Clinton, whom voters know very well, Trump gets a bit of a break for his misstatements. Voters who don't like Clinton won't be giving her a second look. The same can't be said for Trump, as evidenced by [his rise in head-to-head polls](#) over the last few weeks.

Don't take my word on it. Look at what Democratic voters have told us state after state in the primary process.

With just ten primary elections left, Clinton has [earned 1 million fewer votes in 2016](#) than [she earned from the same states in 2008](#). That significant decrease in support against her 76-year-old socialist primary opponent Bernie Sanders is stunning, and does not bode well for turnout in November. Keep in mind that when the Republican primary season concludes, Trump will have earned more primary votes than any Republican candidate in history, including many independents and Democrats who crossed over to support him. An increasingly nasty Democratic primary isn't going to help Clinton.

Where Clinton Is Most Vulnerable

Based on her primary vote totals, Clinton is vulnerable in the lean-Democrat state of New Hampshire (4 electoral votes) and the solid Democrat state of Pennsylvania (20). She also underwhelms in the lean-Republican states of Missouri (10) and North Carolina (13) and the battleground state of Ohio (18). She lost ground from 2008 to 2016 in all of those states. On a positive note, Clinton gained ground in the Democrat

state of Michigan (16) and the battleground states of Florida (29), Virginia (13), and Colorado (9).

For Trump to win, he most certainly needs to do three things: firm up the lean-Republican states of Missouri and North Carolina; take the battleground states of Florida and Ohio; and pull the upset in Pennsylvania, which a Republican hasn't won since 1988.

With those states, Trump would secure the White House with 277 electoral votes — only six more electoral votes than George W. Bush secured in 2000. That feat won't be easy, but it isn't as improbable as pundits declare.

Flyover Country Is Trump Territory

Ohio is a great case in point. In her 2008 primary win against Barack Obama, Clinton dominated in the crescent that starts in the industrial Northeast, moves down through the Appalachian counties, and swings west towards Cincinnati. She [netted over 1.2 million votes](#) from Ohioans.

Eight years later, she won Ohio, but with [over half a million fewer votes](#). Although Trump lost Ohio to Gov. John Kasich, he still managed to win 33 counties, including most of the counties in Clinton's crescent. In losing, Trump earned nearly 50,000 more votes than Clinton did in winning. These results indicate that Ohio will be a dogfight, [as Clinton and Trump battle for victory among the voters living in the crescent](#).

The clear advantage remains with the Democrats, but Clinton's inability to show any semblance of strong campaign skills married with Trump's surprising resiliency in spite of statements that would doom other candidates eats away at that advantage each passing week. Any pundit who says Clinton will win likely lives in the Beltway Bubble, New York City, or Hollywood.

In places like Ohio's crescent and western Pennsylvania, Trump's blunt talk and reputation as a successful businessman is far more appealing than the experts expected. Sixteen very successful and skilled politicians already underestimated Trump's appeal and paid the ultimate political price for it. Don't be surprised if one more politician ends up conceding to Trump on election night.

Matt A. Mayer is President of Opportunity Ohio.