

## Writing The First Draft Of Electoral History: Lessons From Meta-Analysis Of State Polls

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Sooner or later, almost anyone with an interest in the outcome of the 2008 Presidential election will look at an opinion poll. This year, the number of national and state polls has hit a record high. How can one make sense of the proliferation of data?

State polls are sufficiently frequent that they potentially provide a considerably more precise view of the race than national polls. In 2004 I developed a statistical analysis that reduced all available state polls to a single, high-precision snapshot of the race between President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry. Such an analysis is surprisingly simple with the help of basic tools of statistics and probability. The confidence interval on the Meta-Analysis is typically equivalent to less than 0.5% in units of popular opinion. On Election Eve the Meta-Analysis predicted Bush 286 EV, Kerry 252 EV - the actual outcome.

This year I have applied the Meta-Analysis to the race between Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain. I have identified a number of events that were followed by notable changes in the candidates' standings. Examples include Hillary Clinton's withdrawal from the race (Obama +80 EV), the release of the McCain campaign's "Celebrity" ad (McCain +40 EV), and McCain's gaffe on the number of houses he owns (Obama +15 EV). In contrast, Barack Obama's trip to Europe and Asia had no measurable electoral effect. I suggest that the Meta-Analysis is a useful tool for gauging what moves voters.

