**What’s new in the model**[**since 2012?**](https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/election-forecast-obama-begins-with-tenuous-advantage/)

* Not that much! It’s mostly the same model as the one we used to successfully forecast the 2008 and 2012 elections.
* There’s no special variable for Republican Donald Trump or Democrat Hillary Clinton. They’re treated the same as any other candidates would be with the same polling numbers.
* We built procedures to handle Libertarian Gary Johnson and other third-party candidates.
* We double-checked lots of assumptions and code.
* We’re now showing different versions of the model: the **polls-only** and **polls-plus**forecasts, and the**now-cast**(what would happen in an election held today).

**Major themes and findings**

* **Think probabilistically**. Our probabilities are based on the historical accuracy of election polls since 1972. When we say a candidate has a 30 percent chance of winning despite being down in the polls, we’re not just covering our butts. Those estimates reflect the historical uncertainty in polling.
* **State polls > national polls**. All versions of our models gain more information from state polls than from national polls.
* **Errors are correlated**. But while the election is contested at the state level, the error is correlated from state to state. If a candidate beats his polls to win Ohio, there’s a good chance he’ll also do so in Pennsylvania.
* **Be conservative early and aggressive late**. Fluctuations in the polls in the summer are often statistical noise or short-term bounces. The model is trained to be conservative in reacting to them. Fluctuations late in the race are more meaningful, and the model will be more aggressive.

**Three versions of the model**

* **Polls-plus:**Combines polls with an economic index. Since the economic index implies that this election should be a tossup, it assumes the race will tighten somewhat.
* **Polls-only:**A simpler, what-you-see-is-what-you-get version of the model. It assumes current polls reflect the best forecast for November, although with a lot of uncertainty.
* **Now-cast:** A projection of what would happen in a hypothetical election held today. Much more aggressive than the other models.

**Differences between polls-plus and polls-only**

* Polls-plus combines polls with an economic index; polls-only does not.
* Polls-plus will include a convention bounce adjustment; polls-only will not.
* Polls-plus starts by assuming that likely voter polls are better for Republicans; polls-only makes no such assumption. Both models revise this assumption as more data becomes available.
* Polls-plus subtracts points from third-party candidates early in the race, while polls-only does not.
* Both models employ a regression that is based on demographics and past voting history. But polls-only weights the regression less and places less emphasis on past voting history.
* Polls-only accounts for more uncertainty than polls-plus.
* Polls-plus and polls-only will tend to converge as the election approaches.

**Differences between polls-only and now-cast**

* The now-cast is basically the polls-only model, except that we lie to our computer and tell it the election is today.
* As a result, the now-cast is very aggressive. It’s much more confident than polls-plus or polls-only; it weights recent polls more heavily and is more aggressive in calculating a trend line.
* There could be some big differences around the conventions. The polls-only and polls-plus models discount polls taken just after the conventions, whereas the now-cast will work to quickly capture the convention bounce.

**Four major steps**

All versions of the model proceed through four major steps:

* Step 1: Collect, weight and average polls.
* Step 2: Adjust polls.
* Step 3: Combine polls with demographic and (in the case of polls-plus) economic data.
* Step 4: Account for uncertainty and simulate the election thousands of times.