



Can Primary Turnout Predict General Election Results?



By Skyler Lehto



Motivation

- Most forecasts of 2016 election were wrong
- Some state polls missed badly
 - Turnout was different
- How to improve?



Primary Turnout as a Bellwether?

- Some noted high GOP vs. low Democratic turnout
 - Trump underrated?
- But others were dismissive...

NATIONAL, POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Republicans Are Far Outstripping Democrats In Primary Turnout

by Danielle Kurtzleben

2:11pm Mar 16, 2016

FiveThirtyEight

Politics Sports Science & Health Economics Culture

MAR. 18, 2016, AT 6:30 AM

Primary Turnout Means Nothing For The General Election

By Harry Enten

Filed under 2016 Election



FiveThirtyEight's Argument

- Examined national primary turnout over 7 election cycles
- Compared to general election results
 - Found ~no correlation (4 out of 7)
- But $n=7$ is too small
- We should examine state-level instead



 **FiveThirtyEight**

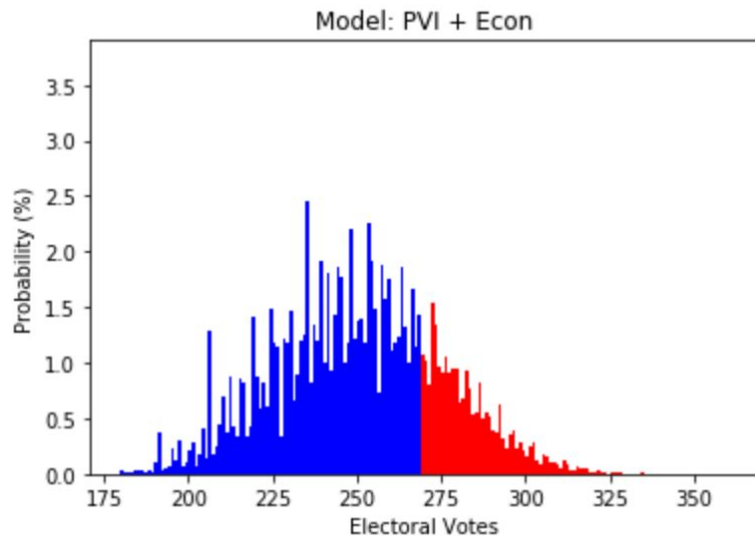
Methodology

1. Data sources: FEC (election data) and BEA (econ data)
2. Computed modified Partisan Voter Index (PVI)
3. Ran logistic regression
 - a. Inputs: PVI, econ data, primary turnout
 - b. To predict: State winner in general election
4. Monte Carlo simulations of # electoral votes won
 - a. Model 1: PVI + econ data
 - b. Model 2: PVI + econ data + **primary turnout**

The Models

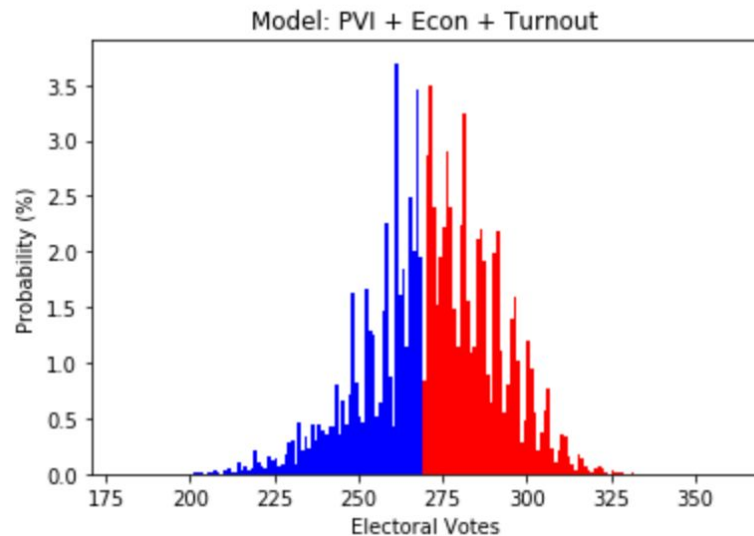
Without primary turnout:

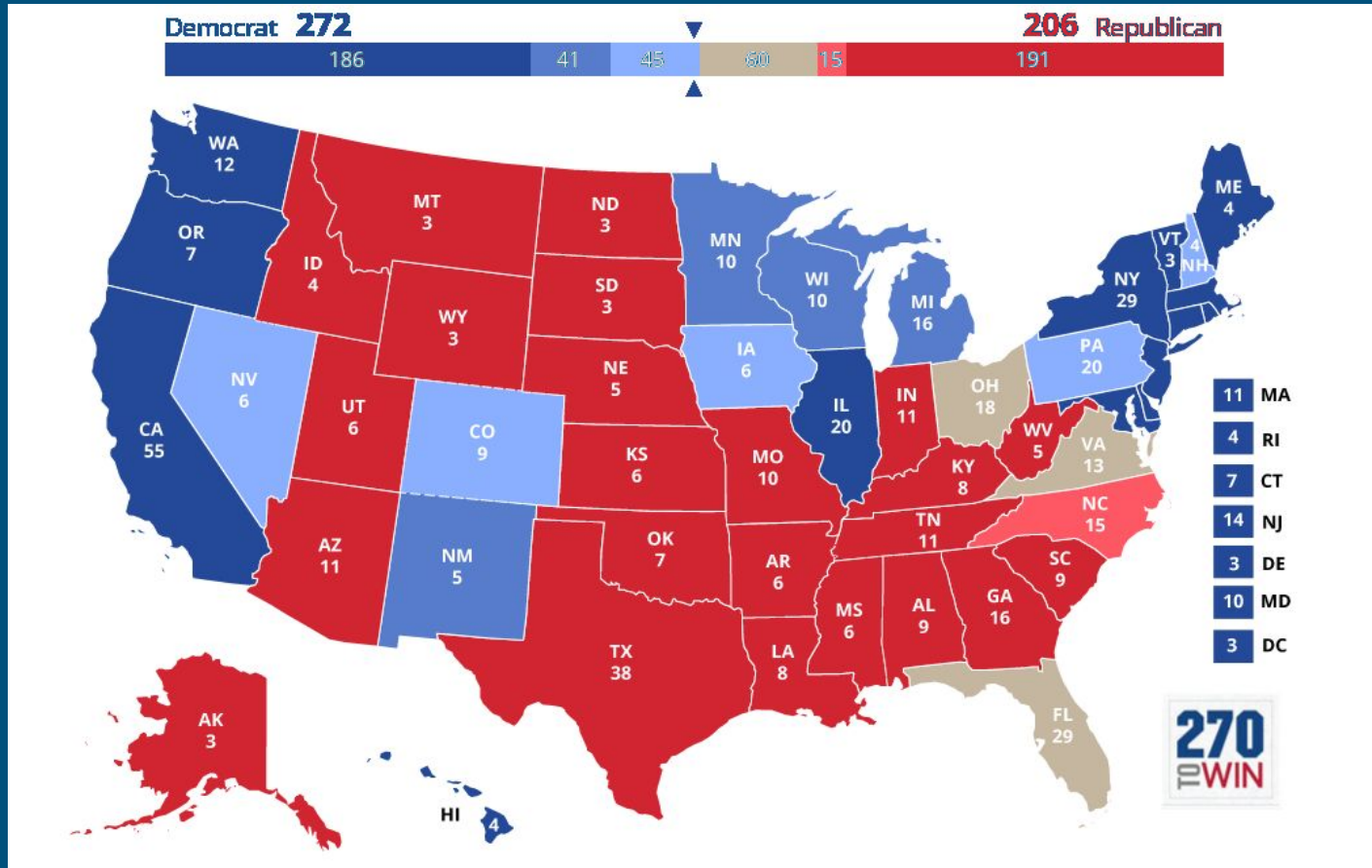
GOP wins: 23.7 %



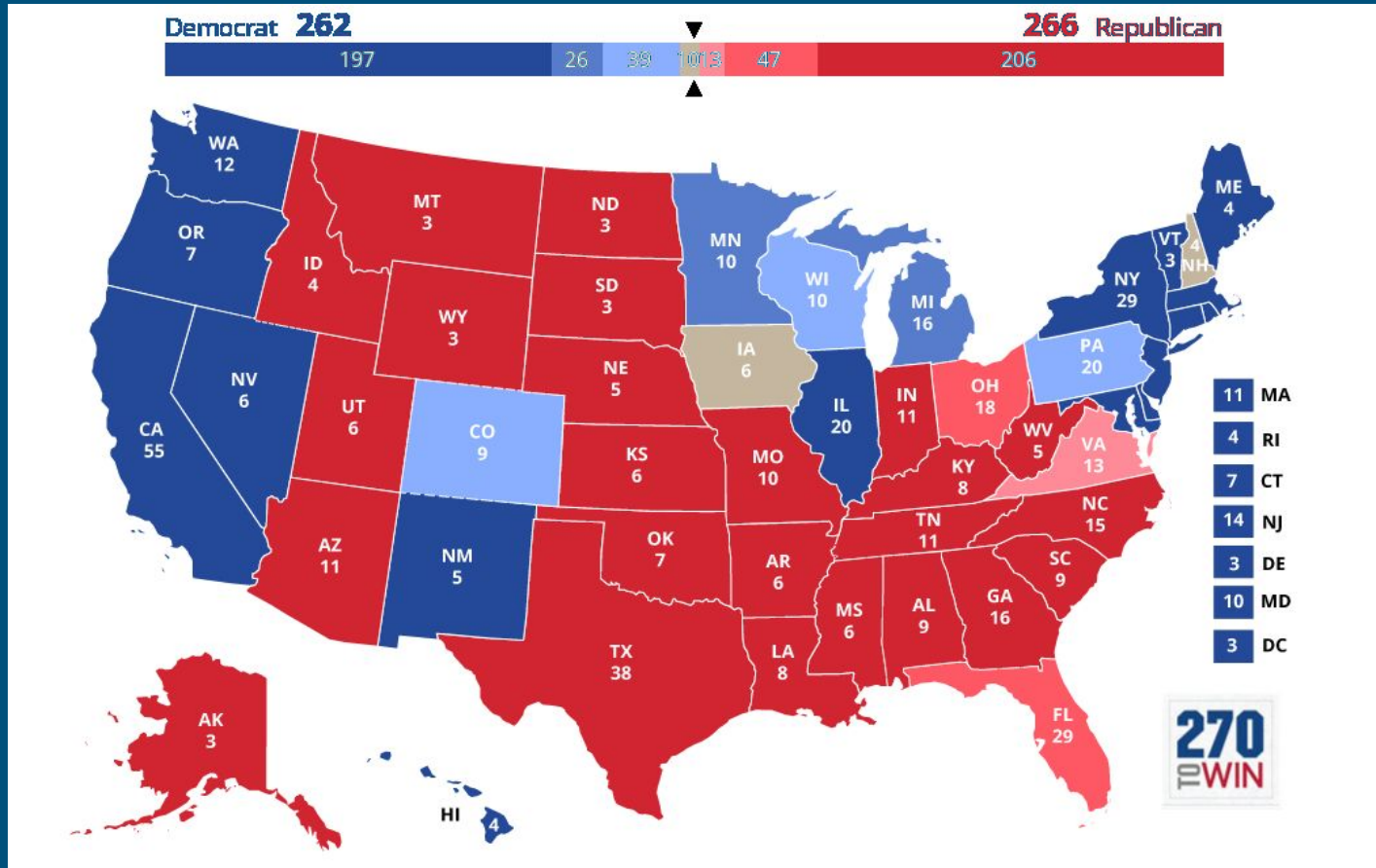
With primary turnout:

GOP wins: 58.6 %

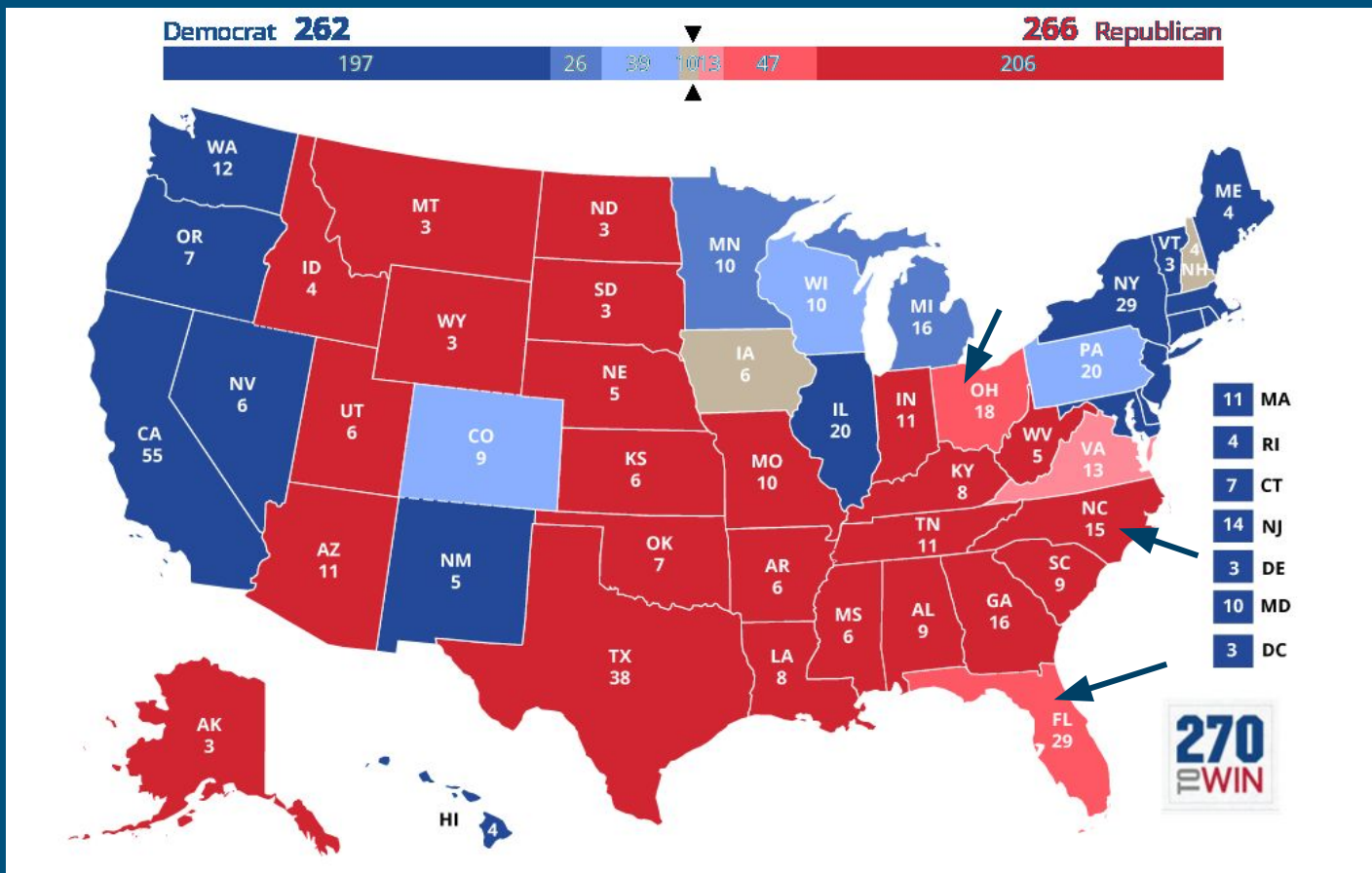




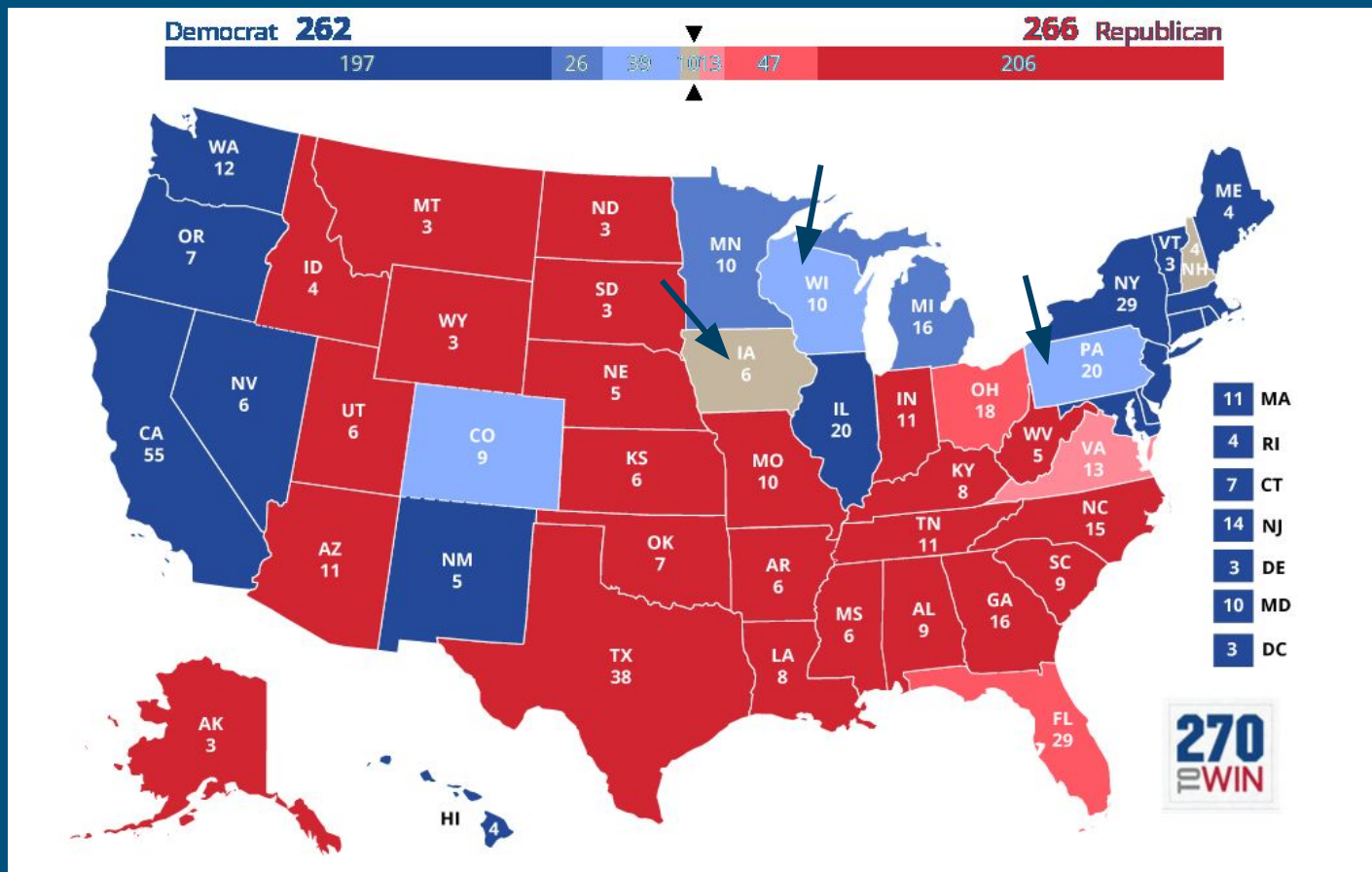
With Primary Turnout



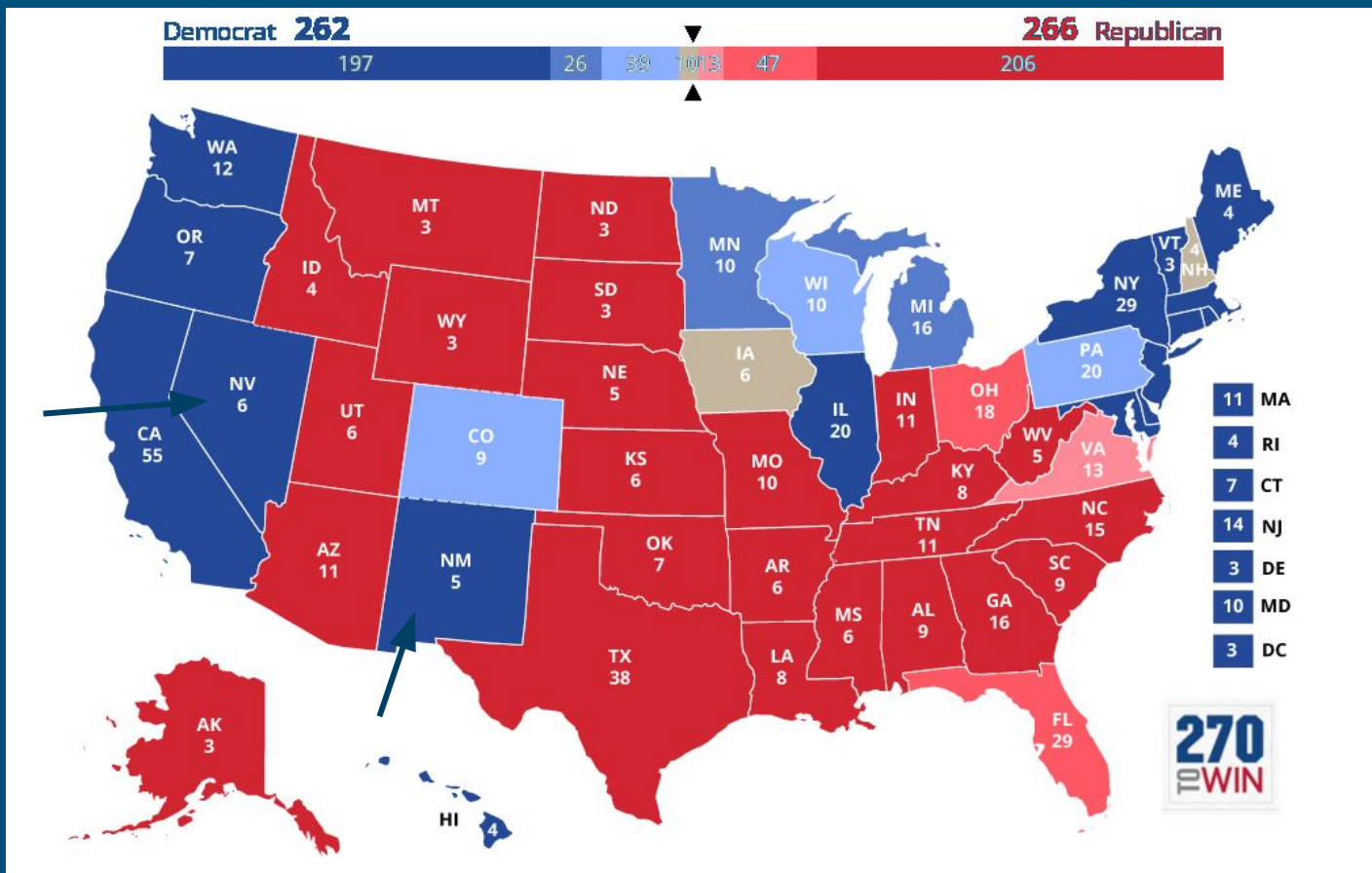
With Primary Turnout



With Primary Turnout



With Primary Turnout



Takeaways

- Pollsters relied too much on 2012 turnout patterns
- Primary turnout has some predictive power
- Can inform likely voter models used in state polls

Contact Me

Skyler Lehto

skylerlehto@gmail.com

[linkedin.com/in/skyler-lehto-70502a61/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/skyler-lehto-70502a61/)

github.com/skylerl2

