

# Can Primary Turnout Predict General Election Results?

By Skyler Lehto



# Motivation

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- Some bad state polls in 2016
- Polls use turnout assumptions
- How to improve?

# Primary Turnout as a Bellwether?

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NATIONAL, POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

## **Republicans Are Far Outstripping Democrats In Primary Turnout**

by Danielle Kurtzleben

2:11pm Mar 16, 2016

# Primary Turnout as a Bellwether?

**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

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- Examined ***national*** primary turnout over 7 elections
- Found ~no correlation (4 out of 7)
- But  $n=7$  is too small
- We can examine ***states*** instead



 **FiveThirtyEight**

# Methodology

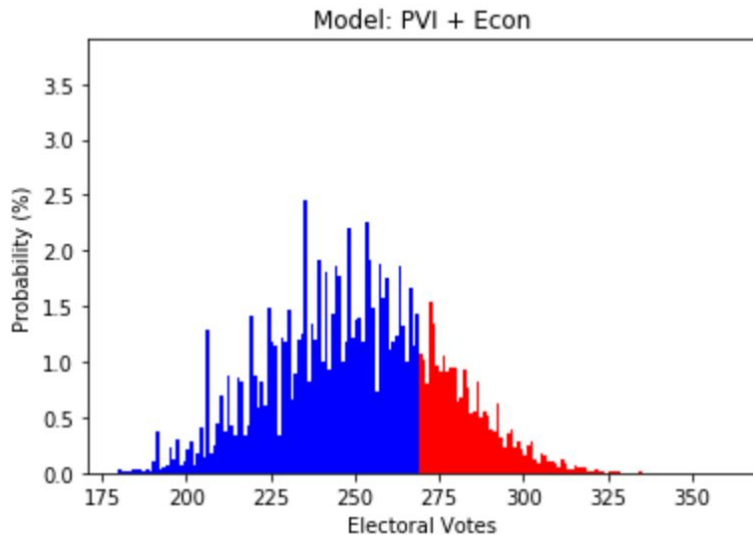
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1. Data sources
  - a. Federal Election Commission
  - b. Bureau of Economic Analysis
2. Computed modified Partisan Voter Index (PVI)
3. Predict state-level winner
  - a. Logistic regression to get probabilities
4. Monte Carlo simulations of # electoral votes won
  - a. Model 1: PVI + econ data
  - b. Model 2: PVI + econ data + **primary turnout**

# Simulated Electoral College Outcomes

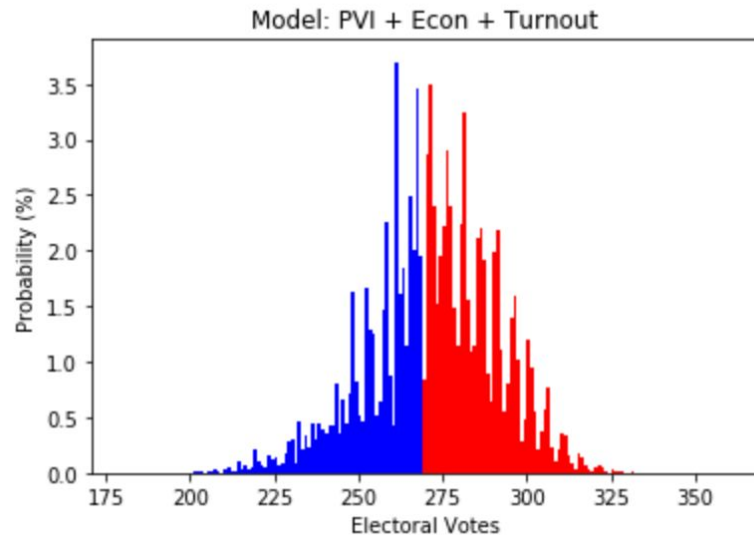
Without primary turnout:

GOP wins: 23.7 %

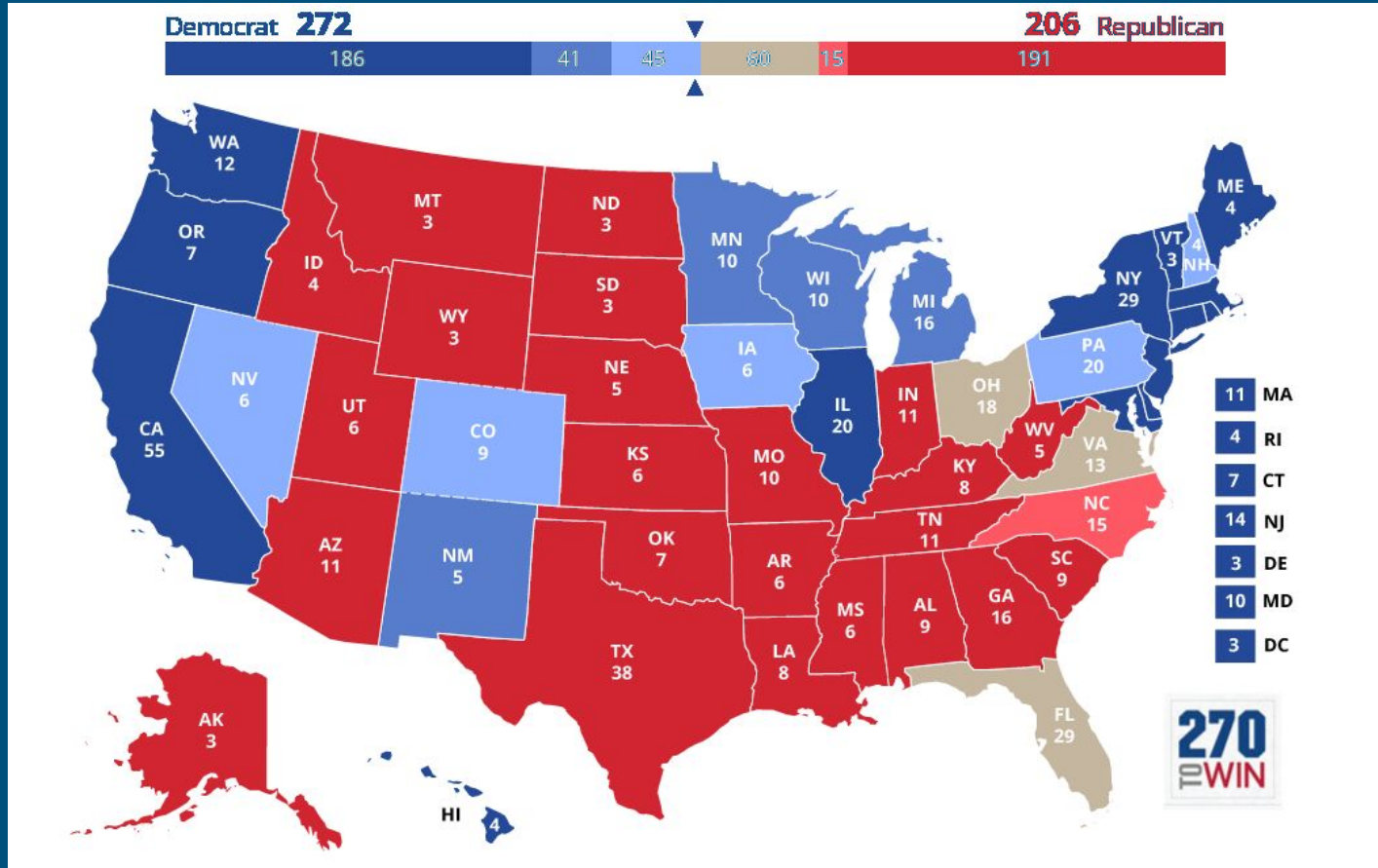


With primary turnout:

GOP wins: 58.6 %

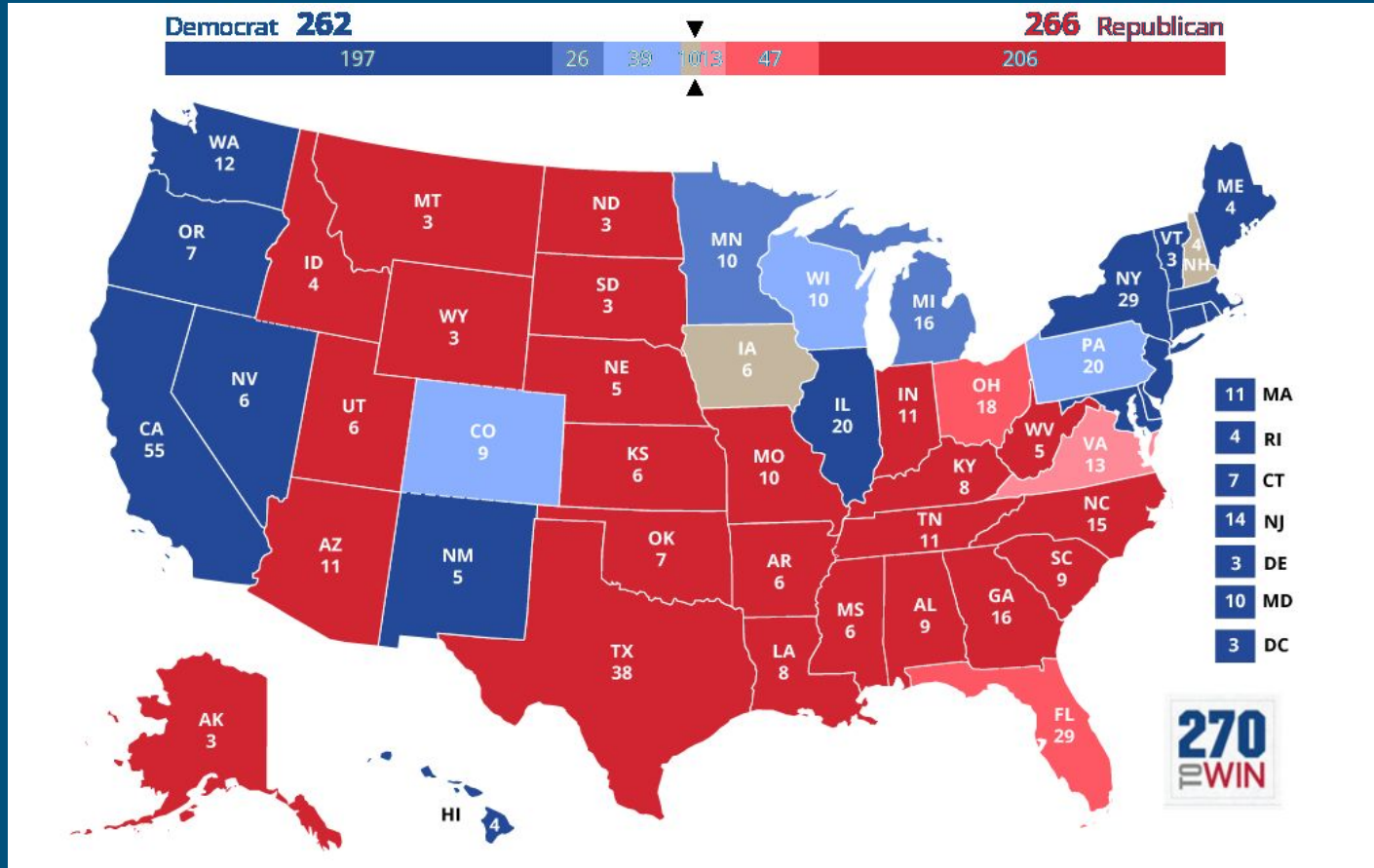


# 2016 General Election: Without Primary Turnout

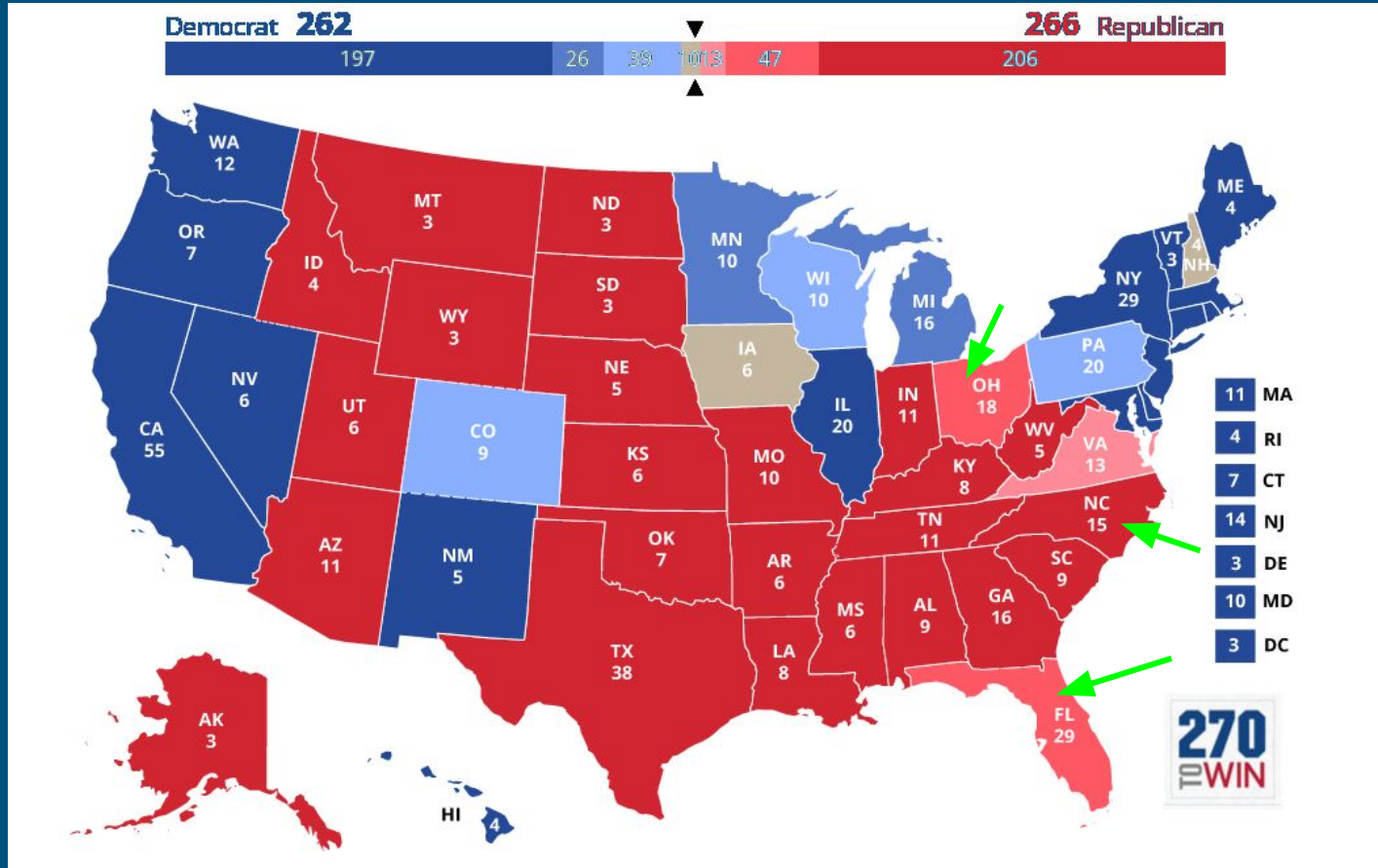




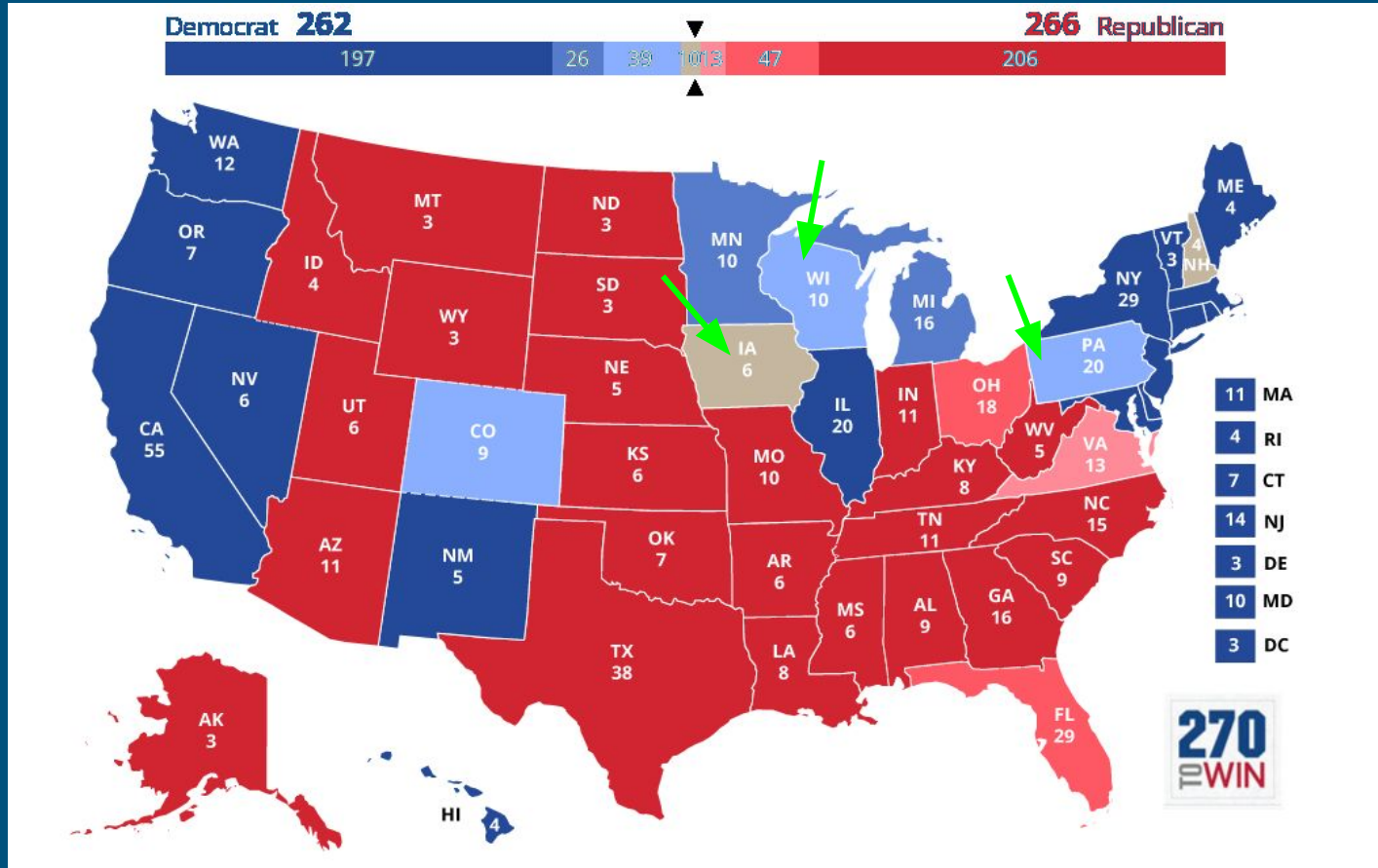
# 2016 General Election: With Primary Turnout



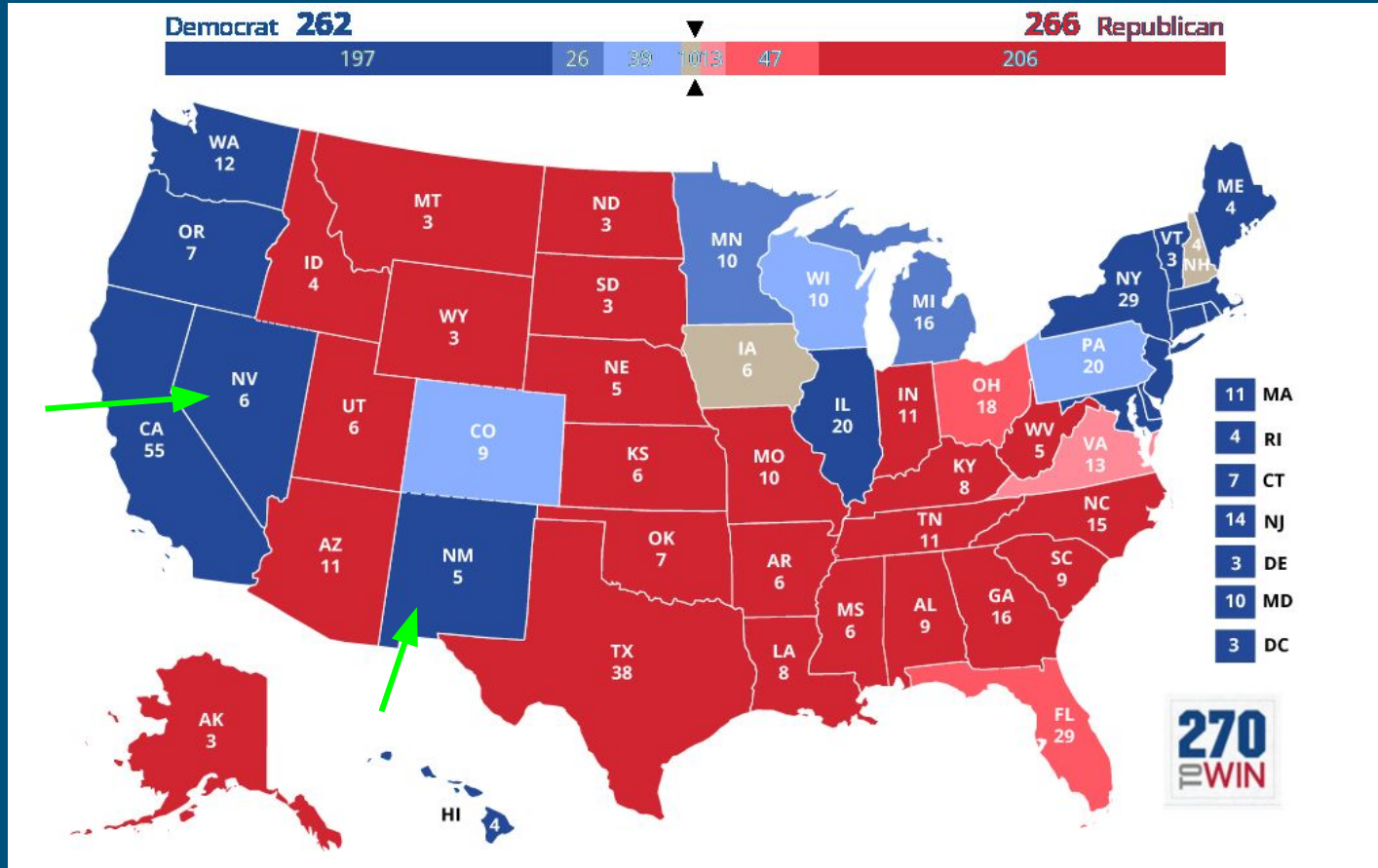
# 2016 General Election: With Primary Turnout



# 2016 General Election: With Primary Turnout



# 2016 General Election: With Primary Turnout



# Takeaways

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- 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

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