

NATIONAL REVIEW

Expect the Unexpected between Now and Election Day

With two months to go, the polls are tightening — and anything could happen.

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Ready, set, go. With Labor Day in the rear-view mirror, the unofficial start of the presidential campaign is upon us. The post-convention bounces have worn off. Donald Trump is finally beginning to put together something that resembles a campaign and has gone several weeks without saying anything overly outrageous. Hillary Clinton has been slammed by almost daily revelations of sleaze, if not quite illegality, surrounding the Clinton Foundation and her private e-mail server. And the latest polls show that this is a much closer race than one might expect.

Taking a quick look at the battlefield:

The electoral map really is scrambled. Donald Trump's campaign was always based on the theory that he could open up the Electoral College map. In particular, he hopes to put traditionally Democratic Midwestern states in play. The most recent polls suggest that he may have a chance. According to a new *Washington Post* poll, he is leading in Ohio and competitive, though still trailing, in states such as Michigan and Wisconsin. On the other hand, the same poll shows Clinton surprisingly competitive in many traditionally Republican states. While few believe that she could really carry Texas or Mississippi, she very well could flip states such as Arizona, North Carolina, and Georgia.

That said, Trump still faces a steep Electoral College climb. According to the *Washington Post*/SurveyMonkey poll, in a four-way race, Clinton leads by at least four points in 17 states that account for 211 electoral votes. Trump leads in 20 states, but they account for just 126 electoral votes. Though the remaining states are competitive, Clinton currently leads in almost all of them.

Are there enough white men behind Trump? Trump still faces an enormous demographic challenge. His support among minority voters is virtually nonexistent. He is losing badly among women, including those married, college-educated women who are traditionally a key Republican constituency. His strongest support comes from white men, who make up a shrinking portion of the electorate. In 1980, Ronald Reagan won by ten points among white men on his way to a 49-state landslide. In 2012, Mitt Romney carried the same group by 20 points and lost the election. Trump is gambling on being able to drive up turnout among white men who stayed home in 2008 and 2012. It's a big gamble.

Gary Johnson is a wildcard. The *Post*'s poll shows Johnson taking at least 15 percent of the vote in 15 states. In his home state of New Mexico, he is drawing 25 percent of the vote. He's taking 23 percent in Utah and 19 percent in Alaska, Idaho, and South Dakota. Adding to the uncertainty, he appears to be siphoning support from different candidates in different states, drawing votes from Clinton in New Mexico and from Trump in Utah, for instance. While his support could fade, especially if he fails to get into the debates, he holds the potential to change the outcome in several states.

The ground game counts. The polls show that, as of now, there is more enthusiasm among Trump's supporters than among Clinton's. That's important. But in a race where voters dislike both candidates, it will be vital for campaigns to locate every possible supporter and get them to the polls. Here, Clinton has a distinct advantage, with nearly 300 field offices while Trump and the Republicans have fewer than 100. In crucial Florida, she has more than 50 offices to Trump's *one*. And Trump has so alienated many GOP officeholders that he won't be able to count on their campaign networks to overcome his own organizational deficiencies.

A lot can still happen. There are 62 days until the election. We still have three presidential debates and a vice presidential debate ahead of us. There will be millions of dollars in television advertising. With WikiLeaks, congressional Republicans, conservative outside groups, and investigative reporters all out there, no one knows what fresh revelations might damage Clinton. Trump is always one tweet away from an explosion. World events can change an election in an instant.

In short, it's been an unpredictable political year, and it's not over yet. About the only thing we can say for certain is that we're in for a wild ride.

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