

25. THE BUSH AND GORE “SHORT LISTS”

“He’d be nuts to even try. It would be a waste of money.”

That was the comment of one of the senior advisers in the Al Gore campaign for President when asked whether George W. Bush would campaign in the state of New York in the November general election.¹ The Gore forces began the campaign certain that Albert Gore, Jr., the Democratic nominee, had New York state and its big pot of electoral votes “in the bag.” The Gore people assumed that the Bush camp would see New York the same way and not bother to campaign or spend money there.

And that’s how it turned out. New York state has 33 electoral votes, the second largest number of electoral votes in the nation after California’s 54. But New York state, with its millions of voters, was of little or no significance in the year 2000 presidential general election campaign. Both Gore and Bush put New York down as a solidly Democratic state and promptly forgot about it.

A presidential candidate, from either political party, will rely on current polling data and past election results to divide the 50 states and the District of Columbia into four major groups: (1) base states, (2) should-win states, (3) marginal states, and (4) unlikely-to-win states. A candidate must win the first 3 of the 4 groups in order to garner an Electoral College victory of 270 or more

electoral votes.

The full list of states a presidential candidate absolutely needs for a narrow Electoral College majority is known as that candidate's "short list."

There are notable differences between the typical short lists of Republican candidates and those of Democratic candidates for the White House. Republicans tend to have longer short lists, with lots of states listed, than Democrats have. But these likely-to-vote-Republican states tend to have small populations and small numbers of electoral votes. Democratic short lists are relatively short in length, with few states on them, but the states listed tend to be populous states with large numbers of electoral votes.

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In the year 2000 presidential election, George W. Bush's short list looked something like this. First were the traditional Republican base states. These were states that could be relied upon to vote consistently Republican from one presidential election to another.

The Bush base states were located primarily in the South, the High Plains states, and the Rocky Mountain West. These states formed a capital letter "L" when looked at on a United States map. There were 16 states in the Bush base with a total of 124 electoral votes

These base Republican states and their electoral votes were as follows.

Southern states: Virginia (13), South Carolina (8), Alabama (9), Mississippi (7), Texas (32), and Oklahoma (8). High plains states: North Dakota (3), South Dakota (3), Nebraska (5), and Kansas (6). Rocky mountain states: Idaho (4), Montana (3), Wyoming (3), and Utah (5). Two core Republican states located outside the “L” were Alaska (3) and Indiana (12).

Next on George W. Bush’s short list were his should-win states. These were states that vote Republican most of the time but which, in big Democratic years, can swing to the Democratic candidate. These Bush should-win states, similar to the Bush base states, were located mainly in the South and West, with additional entries from the Border States and the Midwest. Southern states: North Carolina (14) and Louisiana (9). Western states: Colorado (8), Nevada (4), and Arizona (8). Border States: West Virginia (5) and Kentucky (8). Midwest state: Ohio (21).

There were some surprises on Bush’s list of should-win states in the year 2000 presidential election. West Virginia is normally considered a Democratic state, primarily because of low average income levels in the state and the political strength of unionized coal miners. But in 2000, the strong Clinton-Gore Administration stand in favor of gun control legislation appeared to be hurting Gore in rural West Virginia.

Another unusual state on Bush's should-win list was Ohio, normally considered a typical midwestern swing state. But Ohio is one of the more Republican of the midwestern states, and polls showed the Buckeye State leaning strongly to George W. Bush.

The Bush should-win list contained 8 states with a total of 77 electoral votes. When those 8 should-win states were added to the 16 Bush base states with 124 electoral votes, Bush had a grand total of 201 electoral votes. That was 69 votes short of the 270 needed to win the Electoral College.

Those last 69 votes would have to come from the marginal states. These are states that consistently shift back and forth between the two major parties from one presidential election to the next. Quite naturally, presidential candidates make strenuous efforts to win votes in the marginal states on their short list. Because the Democratic and Republican candidates fight each other so vigorously to win the marginal states, these states often are referred to in the news media as "battleground" states.

The marginal states on Bush's short list most likely were Maine (4), New Hampshire (4), Florida (25), Georgia (13), Missouri (11), Iowa (7), and New Mexico (5). These 7 states combined for a total of 69 electoral votes. When these 69 electoral votes were added to the 201 electoral votes in Bush's base and should-

win states, the resulting total was exactly the 270 votes needed for a narrow Electoral College victory.

That was much too narrow a margin of victory to rely on. For a little insurance, Bush probably added Wisconsin (11) to his short list. Those 11 additional electoral votes would give Bush a prospective total of 281 electoral votes and guarantee election to the White House.

TABLE 25.1: THE PROBABLE BUSH SHORT LIST

<i>CATEGORY</i>	<i>STATE</i>	<i>ELECTORAL VOTES</i>
<i><u>Base</u></i>	Virginia	13
	South Carolina	8
	Alabama	9
	Mississippi	7
	Texas	32
	Oklahoma	8
	North Dakota	3
	South Dakota	3
	Nebraska	5
	Kansas	6
	Idaho	4
	Montana	3
	Wyoming	3
	Utah	5
	Alaska	3
	Indiana	12
	<i><u>Should Win</u></i>	North Carolina
Louisiana		9
Colorado		8
Nevada		4
Arizona		8
West Virginia		5
Kentucky		8
Ohio		21
<i><u>Marginal</u></i>	Maine	4
	New Hampshire	4
	Florida	25
	Georgia	13
	Missouri *	11
	Iowa *	7
	New Mexico	5
Wisconsin *	11	
	TOTAL:	281 (270 needed to win)

* States on both the Bush short list and the Gore short list.

Al Gore's short list probably began with Democratic base states such as New York state (33 electoral votes) and Massachusetts (12). Southern New England has proven loyal Democratic territory over the years, so Connecticut (8) and Rhode Island (4) also were on the Gore short list. Further down the Eastern Seaboard, New Jersey (15), Maryland (10), and the District of Columbia (3) had demonstrated strong Democratic leanings.

It was a long way westward across the heartland of America to find any more states that qualified for the Democratic base. Only Minnesota (10) and Hawaii (4) could be counted as solidly in the Gore camp. But, although there were only 8 states and the District of Columbia in the Democratic base in 2000, those states and the District combined for a total of 99 electoral votes.

Next came the should-win states for Al Gore. Vermont (3) added another New England state to the Gore short list. Illinois (22), with its powerful Democratic vote in the city of Chicago, had proven reliably Democratic, as had the northwestern state of Washington (11). But the real prize on Al Gore's should-win list was California (54), the most populous state in the nation with the highest number of electoral votes.

When Gore's base states with 99 electoral votes were added to his should-win states with 90 electoral votes, Gore had a total of 189 electoral votes. That

meant Gore had to find 81 or more electoral votes in the marginal states in order to get a majority in the Electoral College.

Where to find them? One obvious place to start was Gore's home state of Tennessee (11). Another likely win for Gore would be Arkansas (6), the home state of soon-to-be former President Bill Clinton. Two additional marginal states that Gore could hope to win were the industrial states of Pennsylvania (23) and Michigan (18). And then there was Oregon (7), which resembled its neighboring state of Washington in generally favoring Democratic candidates for President.

In his quest for those last few electoral votes needed to win, Al Gore probably set his sights on three midwestern states famous for their marginality: Missouri (11), Iowa (7), and Wisconsin (11). These last three states were particularly battleground states, because all three of them appeared on both the Bush and Gore short lists.

The addition of these nine marginal states, with a total of 94 electoral votes, gave Gore a grand total of 283 votes in the Electoral College, 13 more votes than the 270 required for victory.

TABLE 25.2: THE PROBABLE GORE SHORT LIST

<i>CATEGORY</i>	<i>STATE</i>	<i>ELECTORAL VOTES</i>
<u><i>Base</i></u>	New York	33
	Massachusetts	12
	Connecticut	8
	Rhode Island	4
	New Jersey	15
	Maryland	10
	District of Columbia	3
	Minnesota	10
	Hawaii	4
	<u><i>Should Win</i></u>	Vermont
Illinois		22
Washington state		11
California		54
<u><i>Marginal</i></u>	Tennessee	11
	Arkansas	6
	Pennsylvania	23
	Michigan	18
	Oregon	7
	Missouri *	11
	Iowa *	7
Wisconsin *	11	
	TOTAL:	283 (270 needed to win)

* States on both the Gore short list and the Bush short list.

As election day neared in the year 2000 presidential election, some major geographic shifts began occurring in both Bush's and Gore's short lists.

California, which had been considered a should-win for Gore, suddenly began showing up in the polls as a marginal state. Additional should-wins that slipped away from Gore into marginal status were Illinois (22) and Washington state (11).

On the other hand, in the state of Florida (25), Gore had opened a narrow lead in the polls in a state which Bush had to win. The Florida shift to Gore was particularly distressing to the Bush forces in view of the fact that Bush's brother, Jeb Bush, was the Republican Governor of Florida. The only other Bush state to start slipping away as election day neared was West Virginia (5), which went from a should-win for Bush to marginal status.

Other seemingly weird changes were taking place. Bush actually surged ahead of Gore in the polls in Gore's home state of Tennessee. The last person to win the presidency while losing his home state was James K. Polk, also from Tennessee, in 1844. And over in Bill Clinton's Arkansas, polls showed Bush and Gore in a dead heat.

With only ten days to go before election day, more and more states began falling into the marginal category. The Associated Press rated 25 states with 214 electoral votes as safe for George W. Bush. On the other side of the fence, Al Gore

had a solid lead in only 11 states plus the District of Columbia , a grouping with only 179 electoral votes. The Associated Press counted 14 states with 145 electoral votes as completely up for grabs. Many of those states, such as Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, bordered on the Great Lakes and were vitally needed by Al Gore for an Electoral College victory.²

By the time of the weekend before election day, *USA Today* saw the race as even closer. Albert Gore, Jr., had a sure lead in only 9 states plus the District of Columbia (a drop from 11 states and the District the week before). George W. Bush could go to the bank with only 23 certain states (down from 25 the week before). That left 18 states with a whopping 231 electoral votes in the marginal category.³

The closeness of the race in so many important states had a dramatic effect on how Bush and Gore were campaigning. Al Gore had to spend extra campaign time and money in his home state of Tennessee, where Bush had a slight but surprising lead in the polls. On the other hand, Gore's slight lead in Florida required Bush to expend time, money, and energy in a state where his brother Jeb's gubernatorial coattails should have been enough to do the job.

Perhaps the weirdest campaign change was George W. Bush's decision to campaign and buy television advertising in California. The Golden State was not

on Bush's short list at all, but pre-election day polls were showing Al Gore's lead in California narrowing to high single digits. The Bush campaign's decision to take a last minute shot at California was highly criticized by a number of Republican political commentators, who argued that Bush did not need California and should be concentrating last minute time and money on states on his short list.

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The last week before election day, a story broke that George W. Bush had been arrested in Maine in 1976 for drunk driving. Bush had often acknowledged to the news media that he had been somewhat young and foolish in the early years of his life. But he also had been very non-specific about exactly what it was he might have done. The story flared briefly on talk radio and in a number of newspapers, but the seriousness of the charge was weakened by two things. First, the story was 24-years-old. Second, Bush had given up drinking completely in the mid 1980s. If the revelation of George W. Bush's 1976 drunk driving arrest helped Al Gore, it did not show up in the public opinion polls, which continued to show the race much too close to call and getting closer.

There was a sharp contrast between Bush and Gore as campaigners during the last weeks before election day. Bush began coasting and acting as though he had the election won. Gore campaigned ever harder, giving the impression he was

behind Bush and needed to catch up with a giant burst of high-pressure last minute campaigning.

Bush's advisers believed that "looking like a winner" was worth an additional 2 to 3 points in the public opinion polls. With that strategy in mind, Bush pursued a fairly relaxed campaign schedule at the end. And he went out of his way to let the news media know it.

But, as the clock wound down toward election day, Al Gore went totally in the other direction. Gore campaigned almost around the clock, and he hit Bush as hard as he could with political charges. Gore was particularly effective in delivering his mantra that he was the candidate who was "fighting for the American middle class." He also argued strenuously that Bush as President would take away many of the gains, such as Social Security and an improved environment, which Democrats had fought so hard for over the years.

The Monday before election day, Al Gore began shaking hands at dawn with factory workers in Waterloo, Iowa. After a few more campaign stops in the Midwest, Gore jetted south to make last minute appearances in Miami and Tampa, Florida. By 4:30 A.M. on election day, a seemingly tireless Gore was taking a coffee break with the night-duty nurses at a Tampa hospital. Then on to a dawn rally in a parking lot.

Gore was pepped up by the thought that he was still campaigning while Bush was snoozing in bed. Gore gloated: “It’s 5:30 in the morning, Texas time, and George W. Bush is still asleep, and I’m still speaking to the people of Florida.”⁴

Endnotes - Chapter 25:

1. Adam Nagourney, “Limits to Bush’s Victory In New York Make State Battle With Gore Unlikely,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2000, p. A23.
2. Ron Fournier, “Bush Grabs Electoral Lead,” *Denver Post*, October 29, 2000, p. 7A. Also see “Mapping The Presidential Race,” *Denver Post*, October 29, 2000, p. 6A.
3. Richard Benedetto, “Electoral College A Cliffhanger,” *USA Today*, November 6, 2000, p. 6A.
4. “Calling All Swing States,” *Newsweek*, Special Election Issue, November 20, 2000, p. 126.