

# Your vote may count more than you think

## COMMENT

### Bush landslide in '88? See the difference just a few votes per state would have made.

A year ago, the question "Can a Democrat win the presidency?" seemed pointless.

George Bush was riding the crest of support for his triumphant Desert Storm policies. He enjoyed over 80% approval in the polls. Prominent Democrats were reluctant to announce their candidacies for the presidency.

Today, Bush's approval rate has been halved, falling below 40%, and about half of those polled disapprove of his performance in office. The sluggish economy barely shows signs of recovery.

But as important is the fact

that Bush, while winning an Electoral College landslide, got only 53.4% of the nationwide popular vote in 1988.

He carried 40 states to Michael Dukakis' 11, receiving an average of 53.7% of the vote cast in every state. But the Electoral College gave him 426 votes to Dukakis' 111, or 79% of the total electoral vote.

If the 1992 vote for Bush decreases by only four percentage points in every state from the 1988 totals, he would lose the presidency. To better understand his vulnerability, consider these possible scenarios:

► **What if Bush runs in 1992**

exactly as he did in 1988? Population shifts recorded by 1990's census tend to favor the Republican Party. The 13 states that have lost electoral votes, with the exception of Montana, Kansas

and Louisiana, all are in the Midwest and East, where Democrats have done relatively well. The eight states that gained electoral votes all are in the South and West, where Republicans have done relatively well. If Bush simply were to carry the same 40 states he did in 1988, his electoral vote



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would increase slightly to 431.

► **What if Bush runs one percentage point lower in each state?** If voters were to swing against Bush uniformly in every state by one percentage point, his popular vote would drop to 52.7%, but he'd lose just Illinois and Pennsylvania — with a combined 45 electoral votes. He still would carry 38 states and 386 electoral votes, plenty to win.

► **What if Bush runs two points lower in each state?** His national popular vote drops to 51.7%, and he loses five more states: New Mexico, Missouri, California, Maryland and Vermont. But he still carries 33 states and 303 electoral votes — the same number John F. Kennedy won with in 1960.

► **What if Bush runs three points lower in each state?** His national popular vote drops to 50.7%, but he loses only

three more states: South Dakota, Connecticut and Montana. He retains 30 states with 289 electoral votes — the closest margin since Woodrow Wilson's re-election in 1916, but still a win.

► **What if Bush runs four points lower in each state?** His national popular vote falls to 49.7%, and he loses only two more states — Michigan and Colorado. Although he still carries 28 states, they have only 263 electoral votes. Bush loses.

Of course, this simple game supposes a swing in voting behavior across each state that is unlikely to occur uniformly. But it is not unreasonable to suggest Bush may run more poorly in 1992 than 1988. If this occurs, and if this electoral swing against him is as much as four points, GOP dominance of the presidency over the last three decades could end.