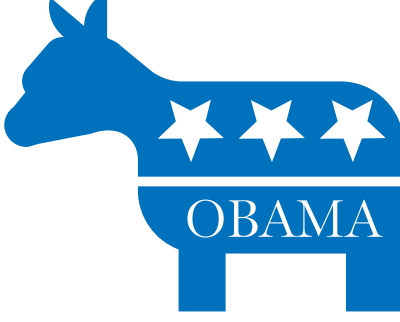
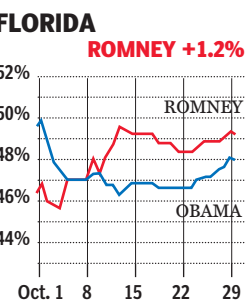


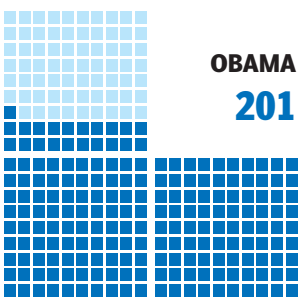
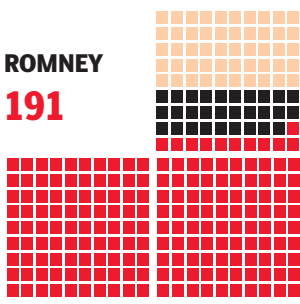
THE TOSS-UPS



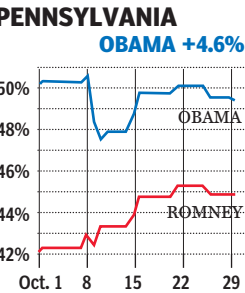
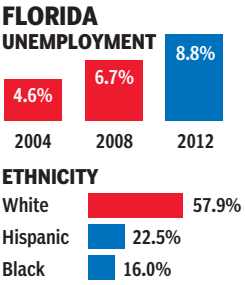
America votes Tuesday with President Barack Obama with the slimmest of leads. The RealClearPolitics average of polls has him in front by 0.3 points. But 11 “toss-up” states will be vital in securing victory. Only a madman would try to predict which way those states will go, so the National Post’s barely hinged Foreign Editor, Michael Higgins, did just that — charting a possible path for both men that could see them within a whisker of winning the 270-plus Electoral College votes needed.



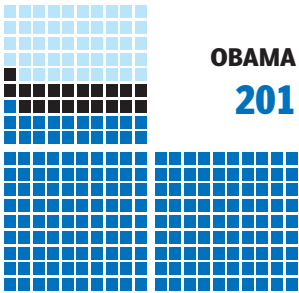
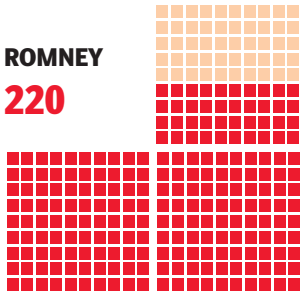
Romney must win here. The state favours Republicans and went heavily Tea Party in 2009 and 2010. If Romney loses, the path to the White House turns into a very large mountain indeed. We're giving it to Romney.



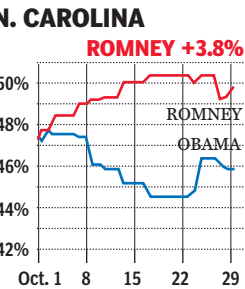
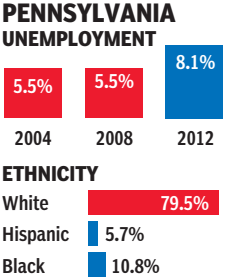
Obama's win in 2008 was the first for Democrats in a decade. He's still polling very closely with some surveys showing he is only a point behind Romney. The president is visiting the state Sunday.



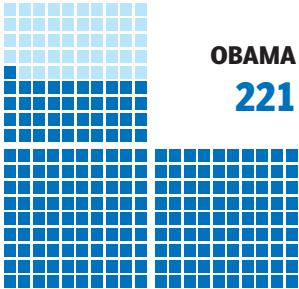
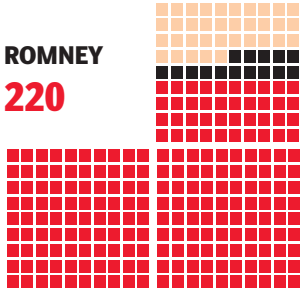
This week Romney added this state to his “target list,” after ignoring it for months, after polls showed he was gaining momentum. He will advertise here just before the election and groups allied with him will spend \$3-million prompting him.



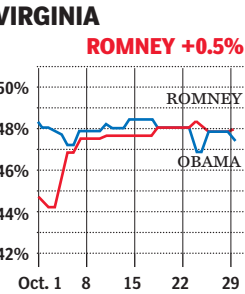
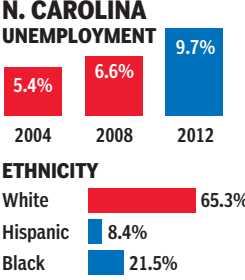
Obama has consistently led in the polls and the state hasn't gone Republican since 1988. If Obama loses Pennsylvania, he's in big trouble. We'll give him the benefit of the doubt. Obama it is.



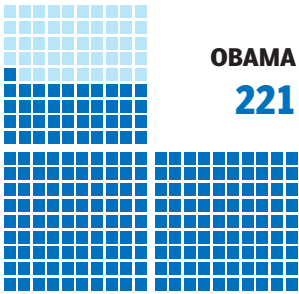
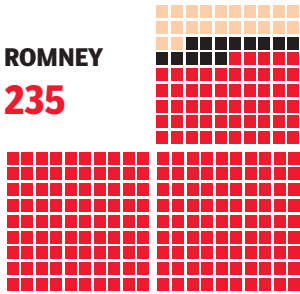
The state was reliably Republican for decades, John McCain lost it by 0.3% in 2008. The Romney campaign has spent \$16-million in advertising, with another \$9-million coming from a Super PAC. If Romney doesn't win here, it's over. Romney takes it.



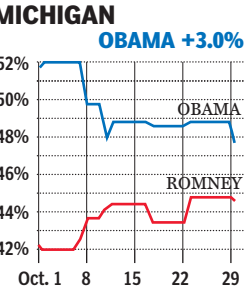
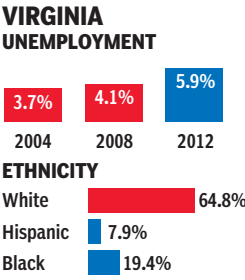
Obama won in 2008, thanks to the African-American vote and a large turnout from young voters from the many colleges. He needs a repeat performance if he is to succeed again. But the state is not crucial to him being re-elected.



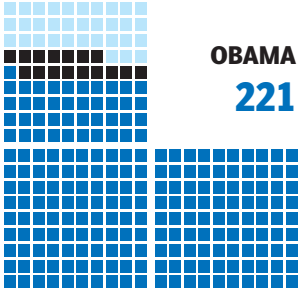
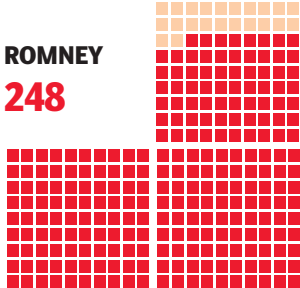
Another vital state for Romney — McCain became the first Republican to lose Virginia since Barry Goldwater in 1964. If Romney can't recapture Virginia, then it will reflect a national trend. Romney by a nose.



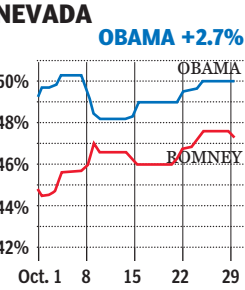
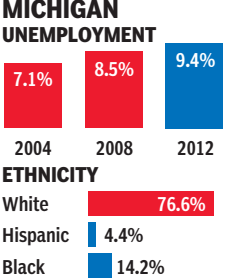
Obama appears to be tied in the state, although some polls have Romney slightly ahead. A win here would be a major boost for Obama.



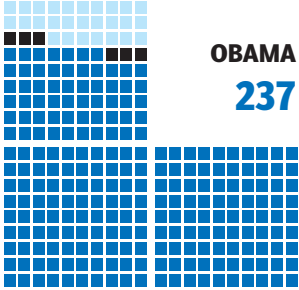
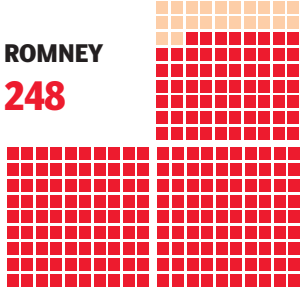
The state became a “toss-up” this week after previously polling heavily in Obama's favour. A poll in the Detroit News showed one major factor for Romney was voters trusted him on the economy. A Romney-associated Super PAC started advertising again in the state.



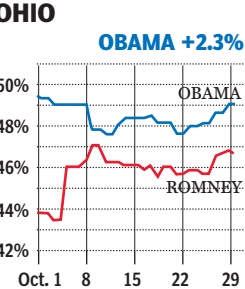
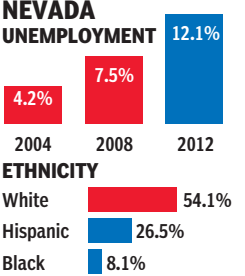
The Obama campaign responded to the Romney moves this week by also announcing that they were renewing advertising in the state. While Obama officials declared they would win the state, the advertising move spoke to their fears it could turn red on election day. We're giving it to Obama.



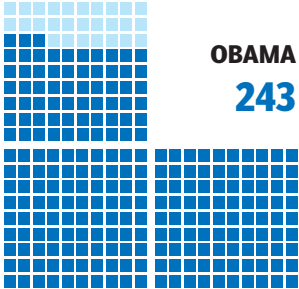
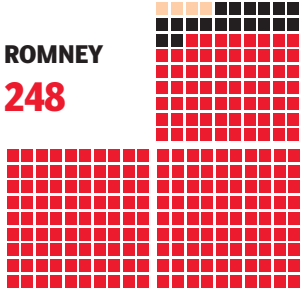
Once a true Republican state, demographics have changed it. Hispanic voters consisted of 15% of the vote in the past two elections, and they favour Obama. Romney hasn't quite given up on the state, but he's down in the polls by several points.



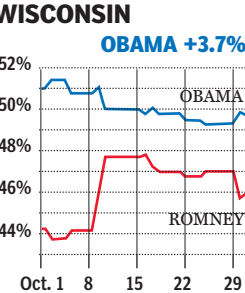
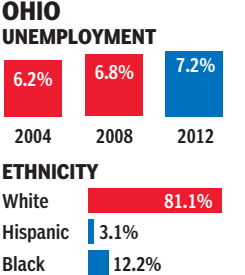
In 2008, Obama won here by 12 points. He won the state on the back of promises to restore the economy, but foreclosures are still rife and the jobless rate is the nation's highest at 11.8%. However, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid is from the state and has built up a considerably powerful ground operation. Obama wins.



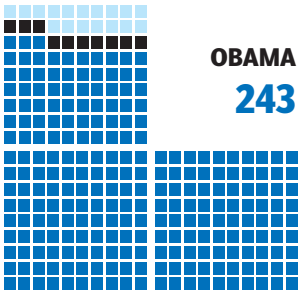
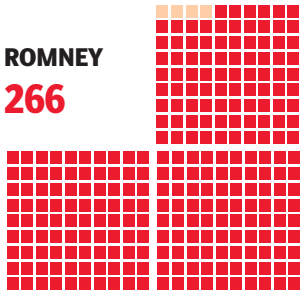
This is the big one. It has been said over and over again: No Republican has ever won the White House without carrying Ohio. Some recent polls showed Romney was either slightly ahead, just behind or tied. If he loses the state, he can still win, but will need a lot of the other swing states.



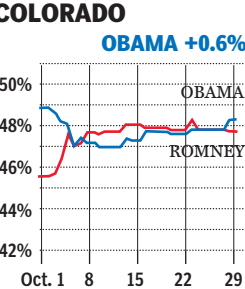
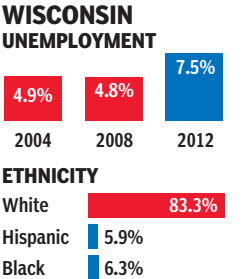
If Obama wins, he'll have 261 Electoral College votes and you'll hear cheers of: “Four More Years!” Frankly, this race is simply too close to call, but in the spirit of seeing where this crazy math could take us we are going to award the state to Romney. Sorry, Barack.



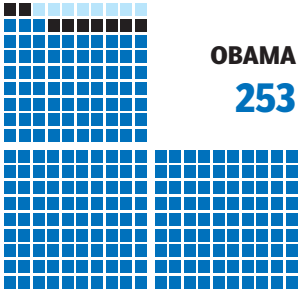
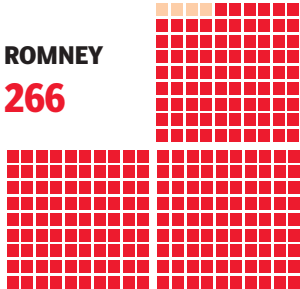
The “Ryan effect” has given real momentum to the Romney campaign in the state. Picking Paul Ryan, a Wisconsin representative, as his vice-presidential running mate, has turned the state into a battleground. Both Romney and Obama visited the state this week.



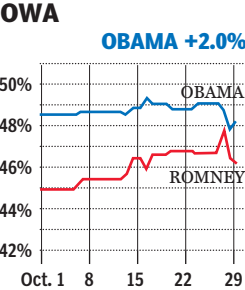
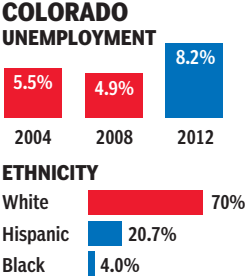
Obama won the state by almost 14 points in 2008. He still leads in many polls, but it is by no means a certain victory. Democrats have held the state for decades — Ronald Reagan last won it for the Republicans in 1984. We're going to keep Romney on tenterhooks and award it to Obama.



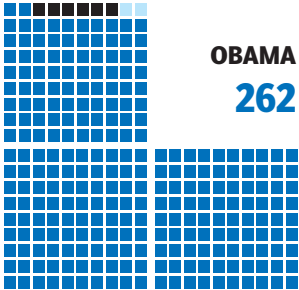
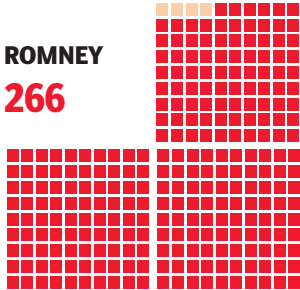
Once considered a Republican state, things have changed. Obama won it with 54% of the vote and a large number of Hispanic voters could also spell trouble for Romney. Romney visits the state Saturday to woo the undecided.



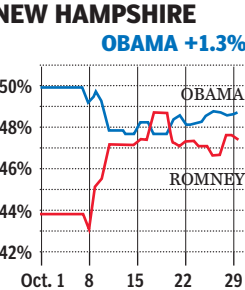
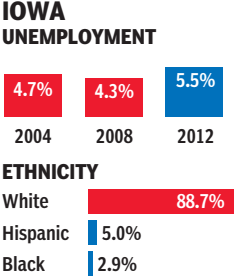
The ethnic vote and women's votes could tip this state in Obama's favour. However, the latest polls have this state as a tie. So we are going to give it to Obama, just to make things really exciting (but still a credible scenario).



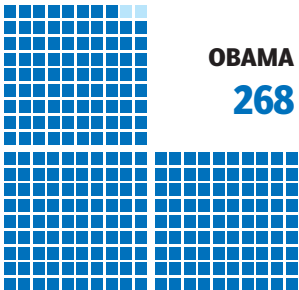
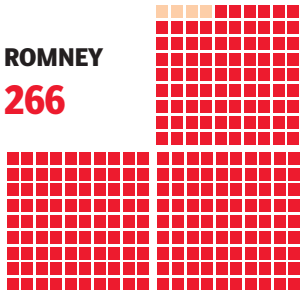
At this stage, it's still possible there is everything to play for, and Iowa could punch well above its weight of six Electoral College votes. Both Obama and Romney have visited here many times, and Romney and affiliated groups have spent well over \$30-million on advertising.



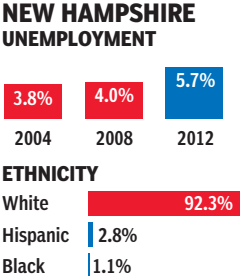
The Obama team has also spent heavily — about \$23-million — showing just how important this state is. Obama leads by a slight margin, according to RealClearPolitics aggregate of polls, but others show him upward of five points ahead. We're going to give it to Obama.



The graph on the left says it all: This race has become very tight. The state tends to have a conservative leaning and Romney has the advantage of previously being governor of neighbouring Massachusetts. He visits the state Saturday.



Obama won here by nine points, but is unlikely to repeat that margin. Women's issues and gender could hand the race to Obama. A new survey Friday from New England College had Obama up six points and leading by a wide margin among women. He visits Sunday.



Does it all come down to New Hampshire? Probably not. What this scenario demonstrates is that even a state with four Electoral College votes could play a pivotal role in the election. Hand Wisconsin or Colorado or Iowa, to Romney — and that's within the bounds of probability — then he has a credible path to the White House. Alternatively, hand North Carolina or Virginia to Obama and he's looking at re-election.