

president. “That was kind of cool,” he says. “I actually had like a hometown candidate now.”

Goodbye baseball, hello politics.

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Silver started blogging on the liberal Daily Kos site under the pseudonym Poblano, and then he started fiverthirtyeight.com. What Silver added that other analysts didn’t was a model that aggregated the existing polling and, based on those numbers as well as demographic and other data, ran computerized simulations of the various primary and general election races. If Obama and Hillary Clinton were facing off in a primary in North Carolina, for instance, Silver could simulate the election one hundred

times and tell you what percentage of the time Obama would win and what percentage Clinton would. His predictions were uncannily accurate, and soon Silver’s readership soared and he was on cable TV, analyzing polls and races.

In 2010 Silver signed a three-year contract with the *New York Times*, and then left to start his own web empire at ESPN, where you can currently find fivethirtyeight.com. There, he blogs regularly on politics and elections—with occasional forays into sports, economics, and popular culture. He’s also written a book, *The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—But Some Don’t*, published in 2012.

What does he want people to get from his work? “I want to inform people, I want people to think more critically about things. Basically, I want people to not be intimidated by numbers and statistics, to not just assume that something that they hear, whether it’s from a politician or from Fox News or from [another] writer in the *New York Times*, is necessarily true. I just want to encourage people to use their brains.”

Here’s some other advice from Nate Silver:

## **On patriotism:**

You probably have some family members who have their flaws and idiosyncrasies and probably a few distant relatives who are even fairly screwed-up people, but you still love them, anyway. I think that’s what patriotism is really, saying, “Look, this is where I was born, or I migrated to the United States, this is where my loyalty is. . . .” You don’t have a choice, it doesn’t matter how unhappy you are, you know? It’s your family, and you are stuck with it.

## **On keeping the republic:**

People just have to be willing to put in the work. It’s a big, complicated world now, and as many people that there are, there are more things to be done. Don’t underestimate your ability to come up with an idea that nobody else has. It happens all the time. Quit being a consumer and be a producer. Start your own blog, start your own political organization. Have fun with it—there is nothing wrong with that at all.

**Source:** Nate Silver spoke with Christine Barbour in July 2010.