

## PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: NATE SILVER



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Public opinion polls generated a lot of controversy in the days leading

up to the 2012 presidential election. Most professional pollsters and the Obama campaign said that their polls forecast an Obama victory; the Romney campaign claimed those polls over-sampled Democrats. At the center of the controversy was Nate Silver, whose forecasting model steadily predicted a likely win for Obama. Republicans said he was shilling for the Democrats, but he ultimately nailed the Electoral College vote.

But then, Nate Silver is a very smart guy, a guy who deals in numbers and mathematical models and predictions all the time. He wasn't long out of college before he had developed the PECOTA (Player Empirical Comparison and Optimization Test Algorithm) system—a model for predicting the performance of baseball players that became associated with a web site called Baseball Prospectus that Silver managed. Baseball is a long way from politics, however, and by 2008 Silver had given up Baseball Prospectus and was concentrating his mathematical prowess on primaries and electoral votes, writing on the new blog that he called [fivethirtyeight.com](http://fivethirtyeight.com) (after the

total number of votes in the Electoral College).

If you ask him how he got to here from there, the answer is about what you'd expect from this young, brilliant, and quirky man. He got into politics because of Internet poker, of course. Doesn't everyone?

Some context here is that Silver is the son of a political scientist, so the world was one he was well familiar with and he liked it. "I was more into politics as compared to a normal person," he says, "because it was interesting, kind of like a big game show." But still, Internet poker?

"In 2006 I was playing poker mostly online. The outgoing Republican Congress passed a law where they basically made online poker illegal, but it was not very effective. What they technically did, more or less, is say you can play poker, but you can't deposit money in and out, so that had a chilling effect on the game . . . that got me following congressional procedure." Besides, he had gone to the University of Chicago, and a member of the Chicago law faculty, Sen. Barack Obama, was running for