

INSIGHTS 2020

Record Early Voting as Polling Trends Remain Steady

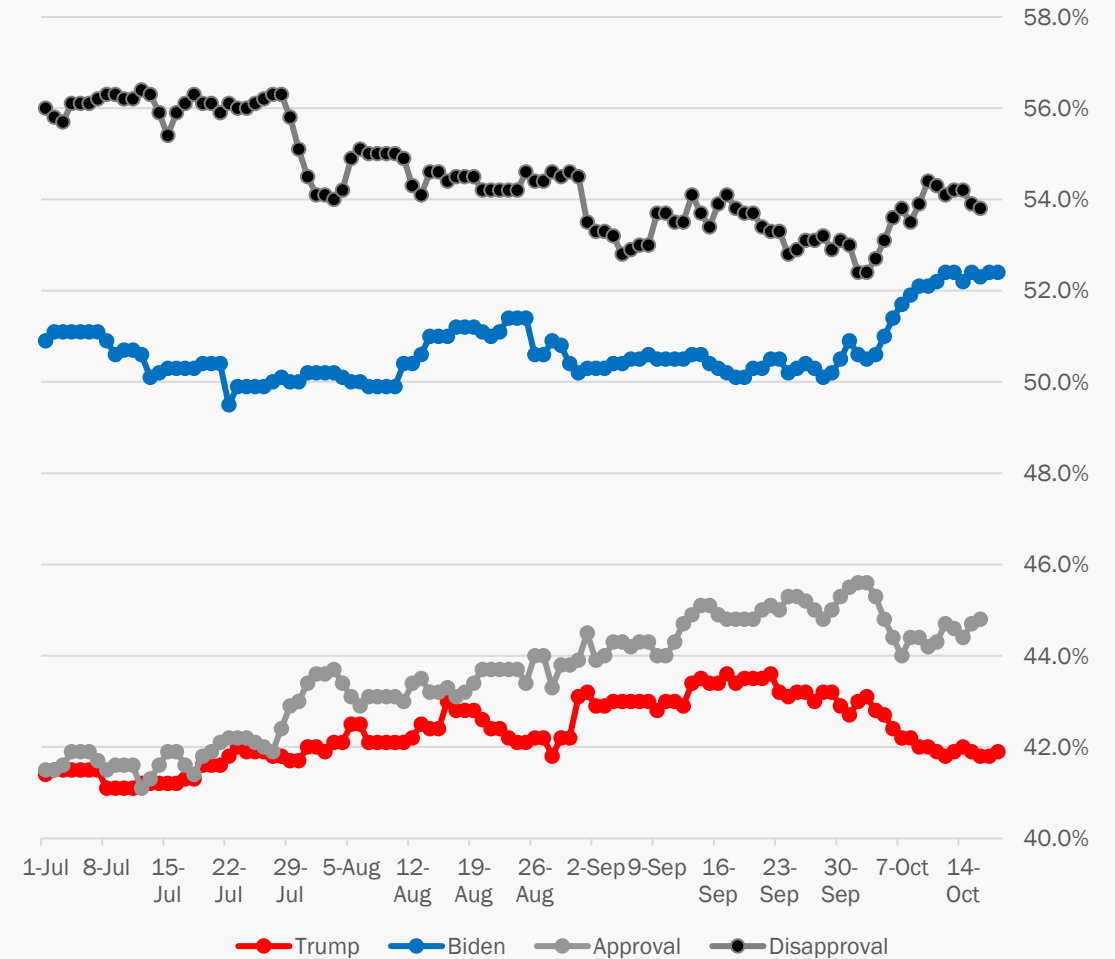
State of the Race: Biden Maintains Edge as Early Voting Shatters Records

Early voting has begun in earnest with Americans flocking to the polls ahead of Election Day at records rates; moreover, Florida voters can begin to cast their early ballots today. At the end of last week, nearly 26 million early votes had been cast, about six times higher than the same period in 2016—and equal to nearly 20 percent of the vote totals that year. The pandemic has scrambled typical voting patterns; nearly 40 percent of Americans said they plan to vote by mail. Democrats have the turnout edge to date—about 53 percent of the ballots have been cast by registered Democrats compared to 36% by registered Republicans—as in past elections. It is difficult to determine whether the activity will increase overall turnout or has resulted from engaged partisans voting early because of the pandemic. To date, 70% of the votes have been cast by Americans over 50. Seniors are the cohort most likely to vote, suggesting that early voting totals may reflect caution. But the volume of voting when former Vice President Biden leads President Trump by 10 points in the national polls should help the challenger. This may be especially significant among older voters, a group that Trump won decisively in 2016 but has leaned towards Biden in recent polling. Thursday’s scheduled presidential debates provides another opportunity for Trump to recast the race heading towards November 3.

(Source for early turnout: NPR.org, “Early Voting Analysis,” 10/18/2020)

National Presidential Polls/Trump Job Approval

Source: RealClearPolitics.com, FiveThirtyEight.com

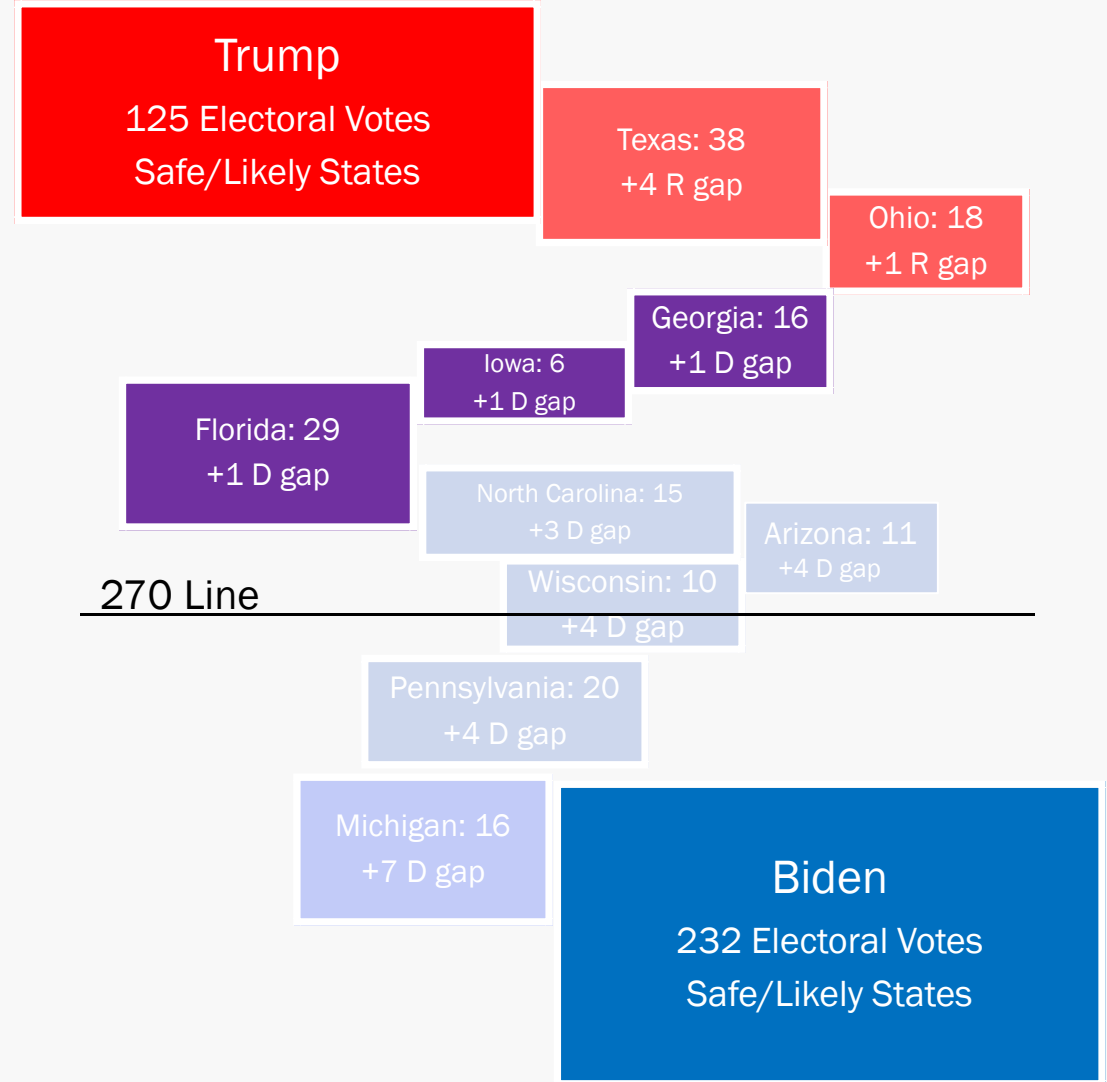


The Path to 270: Trump Must Close the Gap in the Battleground States

The early voting surge may make it more difficult for Trump to overcome Biden's advantage in the polls. Nonetheless, Trump supporters point to the fact that Clinton had similar edges in many of the core battleground states—especially Michigan, Wisconsin and Michigan—at this point four years ago. Yet there are key differences from 2016: Biden is polling at a higher level than Clinton (and at or near 50% in many states); polls have been less volatile; and, Trump is an incumbent with a record, on the pandemic, the economy and other matters. Trump will need a sudden and consistent move toward him in the race's final two weeks. Adding to his challenge, he will close the campaign trailing Biden in cash-on-hand and in television advertising. Biden has maintained a 2:1 advantage in TV advertising in the past month, including a 3:1 edge in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. Biden also has outspent Trump in North Carolina, Arizona and Florida, although Trump has spent more in the past week in the Tampa Bay market, the biggest along Florida's closely contested I-4 corridor.

The chart shows how the path to 270 votes in the Electoral College travels through the 10 most competitive states—all of which Trump won in 2016. Trump is within the margin of error in most of these states, the reason for optimism within his campaign. Each box shows the state's Electoral College votes and current polling averages. Trump's inability to put more "blue" states in play, like Minnesota and Nevada, has expanded Biden's path to victory and narrowed his own.

(Sources: RealClearPolitics and New York Times "Flush with Cash," 10/17/2020)



Congressional Elections

The Close Battle for the Senate

This year there are more competitive races in past cycles and the Democrats have a slight edge as they seek to take control of the Senate. With many of the races also in presidential battlegrounds, the voters' view of Trump may drive Senate outcomes. The table highlights the close races—and keep in mind, it is possible that Georgia's two Senate elections may have January run-offs that determine which party picks the Majority Leader. Democratic angst is high in Michigan, where incumbent Gary Peters (D) has a five-point lead over his challenger, John James, a margin smaller than Biden's lead over Trump. Conversely, Democrats have seen consistently good polls over the past month in toss-up races in Iowa, Maine and North Carolina over incumbent Republicans. Moreover, recent polling showed improved chances for Democrats in the Georgia races.

The House

Analysts now expect House Democrats may slightly increase their majority earned in the "blue wave" 2018 midterms. Democrats should maintain most of the suburban seats, scattered throughout the country, that they won in 2018—thanks especially to the Democratic advantage among women voters and the *Cook Political Report* moved several Republican seats to lean or likely Democratic. Three-fourths of the House seats are not competitive at all and less than 30 are true toss-ups.

Key Senate Races: 2020

Democratic Edge			Toss-up	Republican Edge		
Safe/No Race	Likely Hold	Likely Flip	All GOP Seats	Likely Flip	Likely Hold	Safe/No Race
45	MI	CO, AZ	ME, NC, MT, IA, GA-1, GA-2	AL	TX, AK, SC	42

Key races (current polling averages; source RealClearPolitics.com)

- Sen. Peters +5 over James in MI
- Cunningham +4 over Sen. Tillis in NC
- Greenfield +5 over Sen. Ernst in IA
- Gideon +4 over Sen. Collins in ME
- Sen. Graham +2 over Harrison in SC
- Sen. Perdue +1 over Ossof in GA-1
- Sen. Daines +3.3 over Bullock in MT

By the numbers:

- 33 regular and 2 special elections
- 23 GOP-held seats (18 in states Trump won)
- 12 Democrat-held seats (2 in states Trump won)

Democrats need to net 4 seats gain a majority or net 3 if Biden wins

(Source: RealClearPolitics.com & *Cook Political Report*)