



# 2020 Election Survey



Elections Research Center  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

For release after 7:15 A.M. CDT on Monday, Oct. 26, 2020

## **NEW POLLS SHOW BIDEN WITH GROWING LEADS IN THREE BATTLEGROUNDS STATES**

With voting already well underway, former Vice President Joe Biden has extended his leads over President Donald Trump in three key battleground states — Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin — according to new polls by the Elections Research Center at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Trump’s support had held steady in each state over the past three months, closely mirroring his job approval ratings, which have hovered in the low 40s. The difference in the final days is that a larger share of undecided and potential minor party voters have come to support Biden.

Biden has a massive lead among those who have already voted. Although Trump is favored by those who are yet to vote, the margin is not large enough to compensate for Biden’s advantage in the early vote.

The issue concerns of voters also work in favor of Biden rather than Trump. More likely voters are now identifying the coronavirus outbreak as the most important issue in the country. Despite Trump’s focus on “law and order” in the wake of protests, fewer respondents now see that as the top issue. The nomination of Amy Coney Barrett for an opening on the U.S. Supreme Court has not raised the prominence of the court or abortion much.

These findings are from the fourth and final set of 2020 battleground surveys from the Elections Research Center at UW–Madison. The poll in Wisconsin is conducted in collaboration with the Wisconsin State Journal. Surveys were conducted between Oct. 13 and Oct. 21.

### **General Election Matchups**

Biden has substantial leads over Trump among “likely” voters. Likely voters are defined as registered voters who also report that they are “certain” to vote or have already voted. In contrast to prior ERC surveys this year, Biden has crossed the crucial 50% mark in all three states. Compared to the previous survey in September, Biden’s leads have grown from +6 to +10 in Michigan, from +4 to +8 in Pennsylvania, and from +4 to +9 in Wisconsin.

**Vote Intention (Likely Voters)**

|                | MI  | PA  | WI  |
|----------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Biden          | 52% | 52% | 53% |
| Trump          | 42% | 44% | 44% |
| Other/Not Sure | 5%  | 3%  | 3%  |
| N              | 681 | 669 | 647 |

Biden’s lead is mostly due to wide leads among those who have already voted. Among this group of voters, he earns huge majorities between 73% and 87%. Trump partly compensates for his deficit among the early voters by earning majorities among the larger group of likely voters who have not yet cast ballots.

**Vote Intention (Likely Voters)**

|                | Already Voted |     |     | Not Yet Voted |     |     |
|----------------|---------------|-----|-----|---------------|-----|-----|
|                | MI            | PA  | WI  | MI            | PA  | WI  |
| Biden          | 75%           | 87% | 73% | 35%           | 38% | 39% |
| Trump          | 23%           | 9%  | 26% | 57%           | 59% | 57% |
| Other/Not Sure | 2%            | 4%  | 1%  | 7%            | 3%  | 5%  |
| N              | 297           | 193 | 267 | 384           | 476 | 380 |

Of those who already voted, 92% report that they submitted their ballots by mail. Among likely voters who have not yet voted, 17% intend to vote by mail, 9% plan to vote in person early, and 74% plan to vote in person on Election Day. Voting on Election Day is the intended method for a majority of likely voters who plan to support Trump (86%) but also for those who plan to support Biden (55%).

**Shifts in Vote Intention**

The October ERC survey is part of a panel study in which many of the same respondents have been interviewed multiple times this year. Comparing the current wave to the surveys conducted July 27 to Aug. 6 — before the national party conventions and debates — reveals tremendous stability in voters’ preferences. Among those who supported Biden in midsummer, 99% are still with him; among Trump voters the retention rate is a similar 98%.

**Shifts in Voting Intention Between July/August and October (Likely Voters)**

| October    | July/August |       |            |
|------------|-------------|-------|------------|
|            | Biden       | Trump | Other/None |
| Biden      | 99%         | 1%    | 25%        |
| Trump      | .3%         | 98%   | 36%        |
| Other/None | 1%          | 1%    | 39%        |
| N          | 516         | 496   | 61         |

Respondents were also asked how they voted in the 2016 presidential election. (Reflecting Trump’s narrow victories in all three states, likely voters in the current survey report having favored Trump over Hillary Clinton, 48% to 47%.) Biden appears to fare slightly better than Trump in retaining voters who supported the Democratic ticket four years ago. However, a

more important source of Biden's lead comes from those who voted for non-major party candidates or did not vote at all in 2016.

| October 2020 | 2016    |       |       |      |
|--------------|---------|-------|-------|------|
|              | Clinton | Trump | Other | None |
| Biden        | 96%     | 5%    | 54%   | 64%  |
| Trump        | 2%      | 93%   | 25%   | 29%  |
| Other/None   | 2%      | 3%    | 21%   | 7%   |
| N            | 775     | 790   | 78    | 354  |

Various demographic groups show a lot of stability in their vote intentions over the past three months. Most importantly, Biden continues to be advantaged by an asymmetric gender gap in which more women support him than men support Trump.

|                      | August |       | September |       | October |       |
|----------------------|--------|-------|-----------|-------|---------|-------|
|                      | Biden  | Trump | Biden     | Trump | Biden   | Trump |
| Men                  | 46%    | 50%   | 45%       | 51%   | 47%     | 50%   |
| Women                | 57%    | 38%   | 55%       | 40%   | 58%     | 38%   |
| Democrat             | 93%    | 4%    | 94%       | 4%    | 96%     | 3%    |
| Independent          | 51%    | 42%   | 46%       | 47%   | 47%     | 45%   |
| Republican           | 5%     | 92%   | 4%        | 92%   | 6%      | 92%   |
| Very liberal         | 93%    | 3%    | 95%       | 3%    | 97%     | 2%    |
| Liberal              | 96%    | 2%    | 91%       | 4%    | 95%     | 2%    |
| Moderate             | 61%    | 31%   | 58%       | 34%   | 62%     | 32%   |
| Conservative         | 10%    | 86%   | 9%        | 89%   | 11%     | 87%   |
| Very conservative    | 6%     | 91%   | 3%        | 94%   | 6%      | 92%   |
| High school or less  | 45%    | 51%   | 44%       | 52%   | 44%     | 51%   |
| Some college         | 50%    | 46%   | 49%       | 46%   | 54%     | 43%   |
| College grad or more | 60%    | 34%   | 58%       | 37%   | 60%     | 36%   |
| Big city             | 82%    | 13%   | 74%       | 20%   | 82%     | 15%   |
| Smaller city         | 60%    | 36%   | 57%       | 39%   | 60%     | 33%   |
| Suburb               | 51%    | 44%   | 50%       | 44%   | 53%     | 44%   |
| Small town           | 45%    | 50%   | 46%       | 49%   | 47%     | 49%   |
| Rural area           | 36%    | 60%   | 36%       | 61%   | 37%     | 60%   |

National exit polls in 2016 showed Clinton beating Trump among Black voters 89% to 8% and among Hispanic voters 66% to 28%. The latest ERC survey shows Biden's support among non-white voters to be less dominant than Clinton's nationwide showing in 2016. He leads among Black voters 83% to 12%, among Hispanic voters 67% to 26%, and among other non-white groups 57% to 33%.

The 2016 exit polls showed that Trump won only narrowly among white college graduates but by a large margin among white voters without college degrees (66% to 29%). In the current survey the disparity in vote choices between more- and less-educated white voters has dampened somewhat compared to 2016. Biden's advantage among white college grads is a bit

smaller than Clinton's, but he more than compensates by running far better among non-college white voters. These voters are more numerous than college educated white voters in all three states and comprise an important part of the Biden majority.

**Vote Intention by Education among White Voters (Likely Voters)**

|                | White Non-College Grads |     |     | White College Grads |     |     |
|----------------|-------------------------|-----|-----|---------------------|-----|-----|
|                | MI                      | PA  | WI  | MI                  | PA  | WI  |
| Biden          | 44%                     | 38% | 47% | 55%                 | 66% | 60% |
| Trump          | 51%                     | 58% | 51% | 44%                 | 31% | 35% |
| Other/Not Sure | 5%                      | 3%  | 2%  | 1%                  | 2%  | 4%  |
| N              | 369                     | 373 | 393 | 172                 | 191 | 188 |

**Barrett Nomination**

Since the last survey in September, President Trump nominated Amy Coney Barrett to fill the vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court caused by the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Respondents were asked which of 11 issues was the top concern facing the country. In September, "Supreme Court appointments" was selected by only 3% of Biden voters and 7% of Trump voters. Remarkably, those numbers are unchanged in the October survey. The top issues for Biden voters continue to be the coronavirus outbreak (51%), followed by health care (15%). Among Trump voters the top issues are the economy (45%) and the virus (15%). A focus on "crime" among Trump voters has fallen substantially from 24% in September to 10% in October.

Respondents are somewhat more likely to support than oppose the nomination of Barrett. Among all respondents, 46% believe the Senate should confirm her nomination while 39% oppose it and 15% are not sure. Among likely voters, 48% support confirmation and 42% oppose it, with 9% not sure. Trump voters overwhelmingly support confirmation (93% to 1%) while most Biden voters oppose confirmation (78% to 11%).

**Other Performance Indicators**

Approval ratings of all three Democratic governors fell slightly since the August survey, although Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has more strong support than do Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf and Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers.

Evaluations of Trump's overall performance remain exceptionally stable and unfavorable on balance. More registered voters "strongly disapprove" of Trump (48%) than "strongly" or "somewhat" approve of him combined (44%).

**Other Performance Indicators (Registered Voters)**

|                |                     | MI  | PA  | WI  |
|----------------|---------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Trump Overall  | Strongly Approve    | 27% | 31% | 27% |
| Job Handling   | Somewhat Approve    | 16% | 13% | 17% |
|                | Somewhat Disapprove | 7%  | 6%  | 8%  |
|                | Strongly Disapprove | 48% | 49% | 46% |
| Trump Handling | Strongly Approve    | 32% | 36% | 35% |

|             |                     |     |     |     |
|-------------|---------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| of Economy  | Somewhat Approve    | 15% | 10% | 13% |
|             | Somewhat Disapprove | 8%  | 10% | 11% |
|             | Strongly Disapprove | 42% | 42% | 40% |
| Governor    | Strongly Approve    | 35% | 23% | 20% |
| Overall Job | Somewhat Approve    | 18% | 28% | 25% |
| Handling    | Somewhat Disapprove | 12% | 14% | 16% |
|             | Strongly Disapprove | 31% | 30% | 30% |

Ratings of Trump's overall performance are related to how people are voting. This explains why he has not reached the 50% mark in any of the three states.

#### Vote Intention by Overall Trump Job Approval (Likely Voters)

|            | Strongly Approve | Somewhat Approve | Somewhat Disapprove | Strongly Disapprove |
|------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Biden      | 1%               | 10%              | 56%                 | 97%                 |
| Trump      | 98%              | 84%              | 24%                 | .1%                 |
| Other/None | .5%              | 6%               | 20%                 | 3%                  |
| N          | 609              | 284              | 108                 | 975                 |

#### Campaign Contact

Compared to the September survey, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of people who have been contacted by at least one of the campaigns. Among likely voters, 70% report being contacted, an increase of eight points from the previous survey. The increase has been most pronounced in Wisconsin, where supporters of both major party candidates are contacted at high and similar rates.

#### Campaign Contact Rates (Likely Voters)

|              | MI  | PA  | WI  |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Biden Voters | 73% | 68% | 76% |
| Trump Voters | 66% | 62% | 76% |

Likely voters in all three states tend to report they were contacted by both parties. Among those who have heard from only one party, Democrats have reached more likely voters than have Republicans. Combining the three states, Biden voters were somewhat more likely to only hear from the Democrats (35%) than Trump voters were to hear only from the Republicans (27%).

#### Who Did the Contacting (Likely Voters)

|                           | MI  | PA  | WI  |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Contacted by Democrats    | 21% | 26% | 20% |
| Contacted by Republicans  | 10% | 19% | 16% |
| Contacted by both parties | 67% | 54% | 64% |

Compared to last month's survey, methods for contacting likely voters have shifted more toward mailed letters and postcards. Mail is the dominant way that Trump voters have been reached, whereas Biden voters are almost as likely to have gotten digital communication in the

form of email or text. In-person contact ticked up slightly in October but remains quite uncommon.

| <b>How Voters Were Contacted (Likely Voters)</b> |                     |                     |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
|  | <b>Biden Voters</b> | <b>Trump Voters</b> |
| Email  | 62%                 | 57%                 |
| Letter or postcard                               | 69%                 | 77%                 |
| Text   | 69%                 | 54%                 |
| Phone call                                       | 56%                 | 61%                 |
| In person  | 6%                  | 9%                  |

### **More About the Survey**

This is the fourth set of surveys in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin conducted during the 2020 election season by the ERC, in partnership with the Wisconsin State Journal for all polling done in Wisconsin.

Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin all voted for Democratic presidential candidates going back to the 1980s but flipped to the Republicans in 2016 to help President Donald Trump win the Electoral College.

Surveys of voting age adults were conducted by YouGov under the direction of the ERC. YouGov is a leading marketing and polling firm that conducts surveys for news outlets such as CBS News, the Economist and the Huffington Post. Interviews were conducted online with respondents selected from YouGov's opt-in panel. The sample was selected and weighted to reflect the adult population in each state based on gender, age, race and education.

Eight hundred respondents were surveyed in each of the three states. The margin of error for the full sample is plus or minus 3.98% in Michigan, 4.20% in Pennsylvania and 3.73% in Wisconsin. For likely voters, the margin of error is 4.20% in Michigan, 4.45% in Pennsylvania and 4.07% in Wisconsin.

Percentages reported in the tables above do not always sum to 100% due to rounding.

More analysis about the poll and results from prior surveys are available on the Elections Research Center's website ([elections.wisc.edu](http://elections.wisc.edu)).

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