



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 BATTLEGROUND 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.

How Voters Were Contacted (Likely Voters)		
	Biden Voters	Trump Voters
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).

Experts from the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Elections Research Center are available for analysis of the survey.

UW ERC faculty members:

- Barry Burden, Professor of Political Science, Director of Elections Research Center, bcburden@wisc.edu, 608-263-6351
- David Canon, Professor of Political Science, dcanon@polisci.wisc.edu, 608-263-2283
- Katherine Cramer, Professor of Political Science, kathy.cramer@wisc.edu, 608-347-8528
- Kenneth Mayer, Professor of Political Science, kmayer@polisci.wisc.edu, 608-263-2286

- Eleanor Powell, Associate Professor of Political Science, eleanor.powell@wisc.edu, 608-265-5798
- Michael Wagner, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication, mwagner8@wisc.edu, 608-263-3392

Wisconsin State Journal contact: Matt DeFour, state politics editor, mdefour@madison.com, 608-252-6144

UW–Madison national media relations contact: Veronica Rueckert, rueckert@wisc.edu, 608-262-7288

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