



PEORIA Presidential Prediction Project: Battleground States Model

August 10, 2020

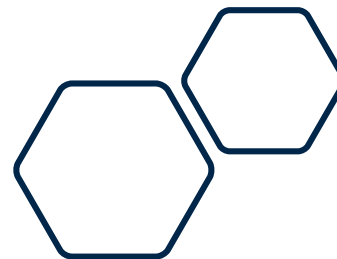


Our Research Mission

We seek to learn how Twitter data, which measures the pulse of public conversations about campaign politics, can improve predictions of election outcomes.

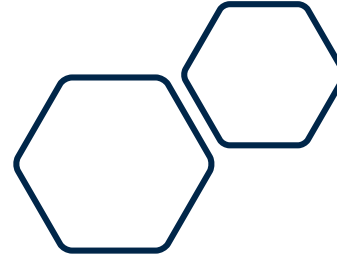
We have constructed a model that forecasts the battleground state results for the 2020 presidential election based on current information.

We will update the calculations on a biweekly basis between August 10th and the November election.



Our Forecast Model

- The forecast model predicts incumbent (Trump) vote share in these twelve battleground states
 - AZ, CO, FL, GA, IA, MI, NC, NV, OH, PA, TX, WI
- The remaining 38 states and D.C. are scored as party base states to yield an electoral total.
 - For example, MA is part of the Democratic base, while WY is part of the Republican base

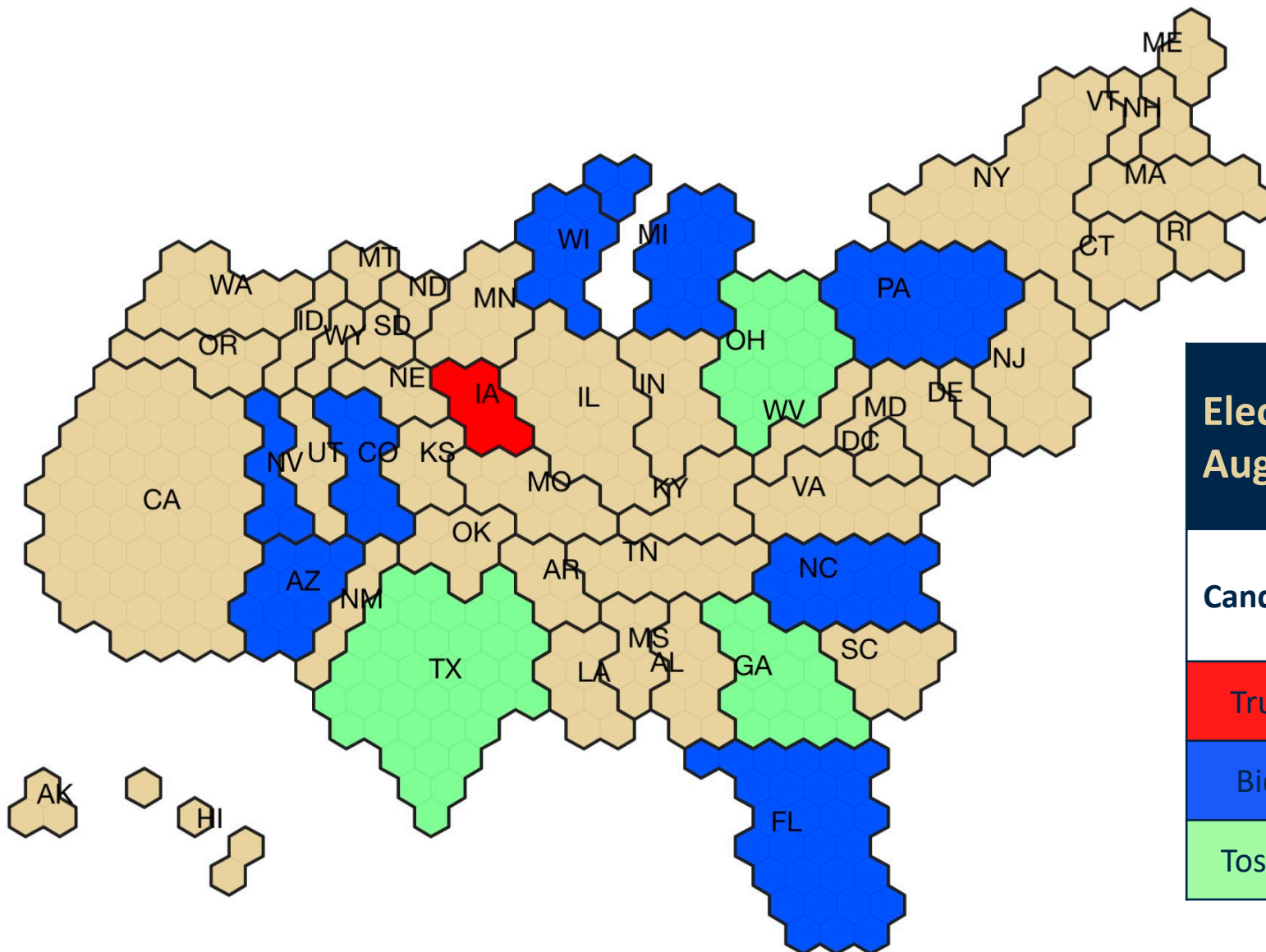
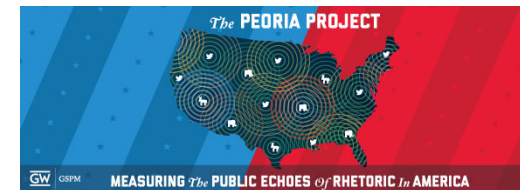


Variables

Our battleground state model relies on the variables:

- State-level polling, aggregated by state weekly (using polling available on [RCP](#) and [FiveThirtyEight](#))
- State's partisan lean (using [Gallup's state-level party affiliation](#))
- State-level incumbent share of Twitter (share of mentions interacted with change in negative sentiment)
- State-level change in unemployment since January of the election year (using [US Bureau of Labor Statistics](#))
- National net candidate favorability (using [RCP](#))

*For further details, see slide 26



| Electoral Vote Forecast Aug 10, 2020 Model | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------|------|----------------|-------|
| Candidate | Base | Model Estimate | Total |
| Trump | 126 | 6 | 132 |
| Biden | 218 | 116 | 334 |
| Toss-Up | 0 | 72 | 72 |

Trump's
 Predicted State
 Vote Share*
 Relative to his
 National Vote
 Share:
 August 10, 2020
 Model

| Incumbent (Trump) National Vote Share | AZ | CO | FL | GA | IA | MI | NC | NV | OH | PA | TX | WI |
|---------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 45 | 47 | 43 | 47 | 49 | 50 | 46 | 49 | 47 | 49 | 47 | 50 | 47 |
| 46 | 48 | 44 | 48 | 50 | 51 | 47 | 50 | 48 | 50 | 48 | 51 | 48 |
| 47 | 49 | 45 | 49 | 51 | 52 | 48 | 51 | 49 | 51 | 49 | 52 | 49 |
| 48 | 50 | 46 | 50 | 52 | 53 | 49 | 52 | 50 | 52 | 50 | 53 | 50 |
| 49 | 51 | 47 | 51 | 53 | 54 | 50 | 53 | 52 | 53 | 52 | 54 | 51 |
| 50 | 52 | 48 | 52 | 54 | 55 | 51 | 54 | 52 | 54 | 52 | 55 | 52 |
| 51 | 53 | 49 | 53 | 55 | 56 | 52 | 55 | 53 | 55 | 53 | 56 | 53 |

*Vote share calculated as the two-party vote

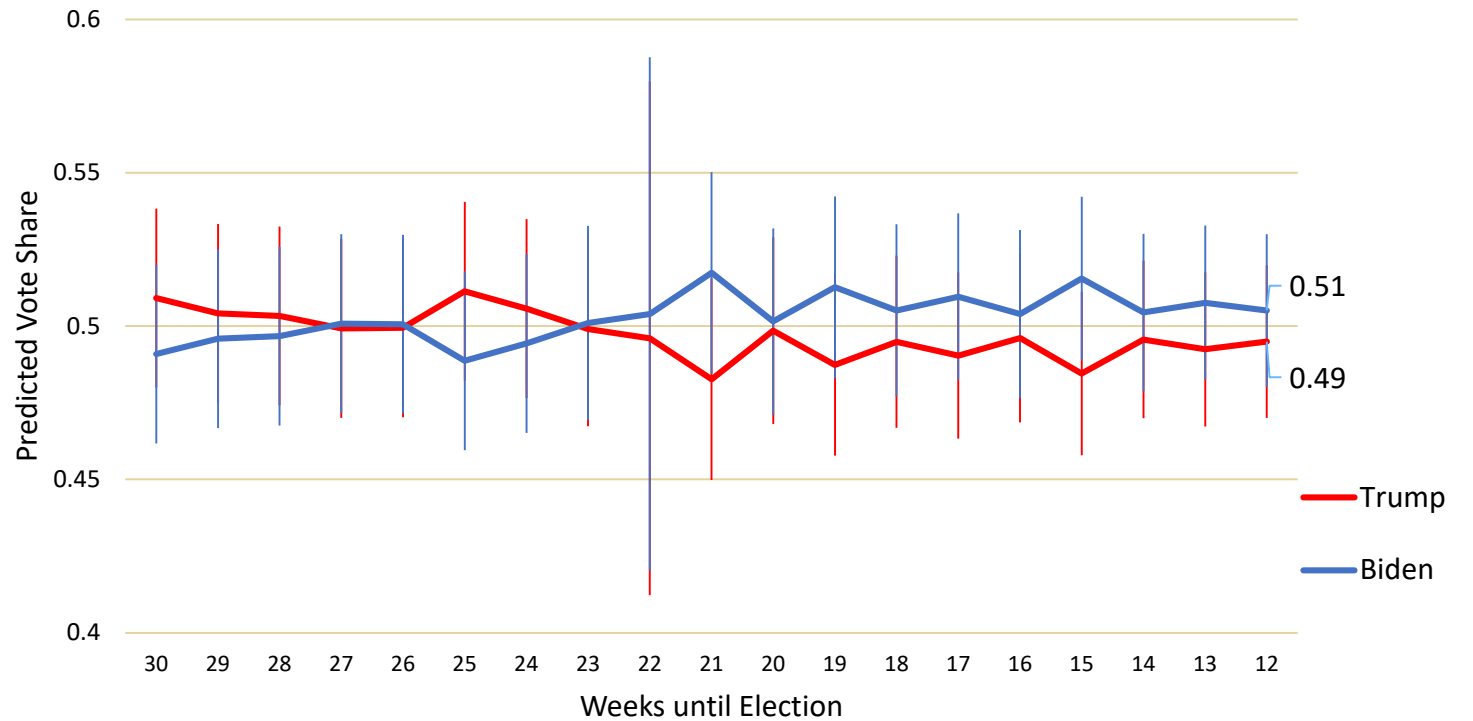
For reference, in 2016, Trump won 48.9% of the two-party vote share

In 2018, Republicans in the House won 45.6% of the two-party vote share

Toss-Up States

Presented in order of most to least competitive.

Ohio



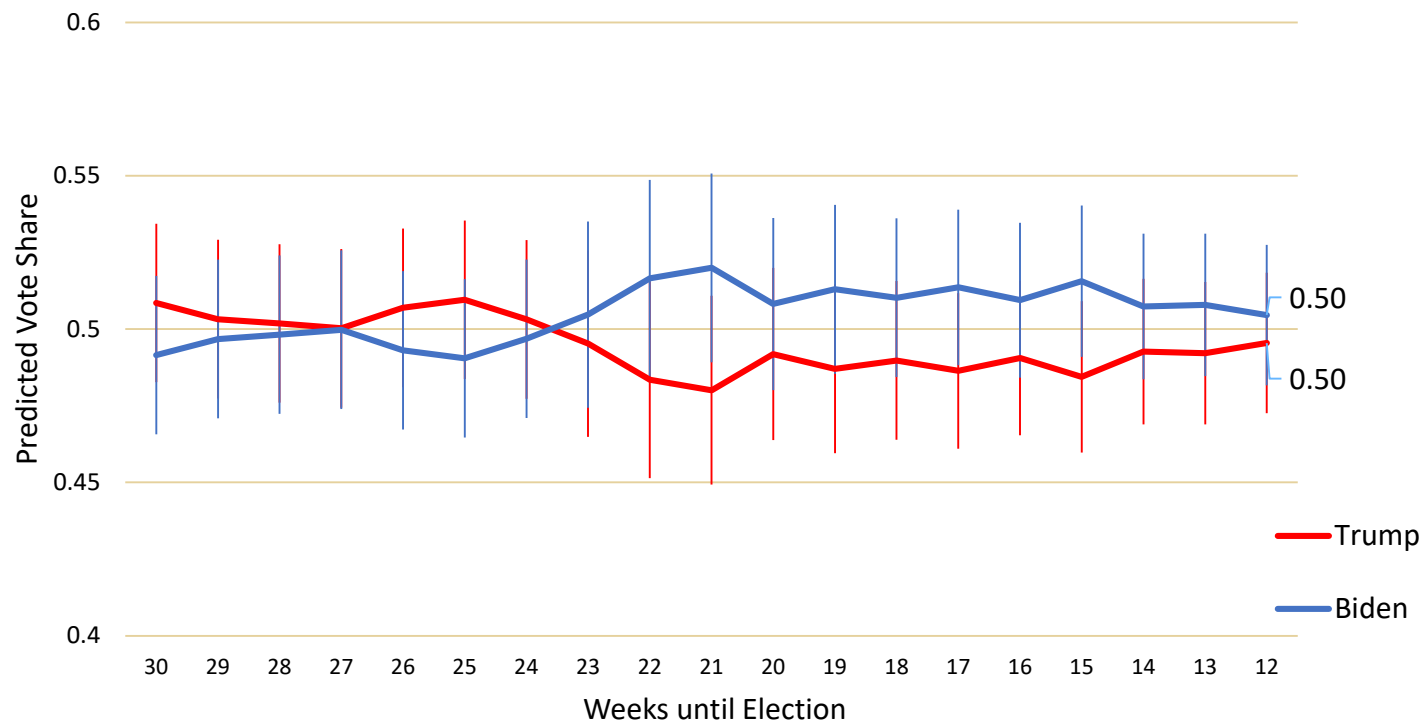
Trump's chance of winning: 45%

(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 47.0 – 52.0%

(80% prediction intervals)

Georgia



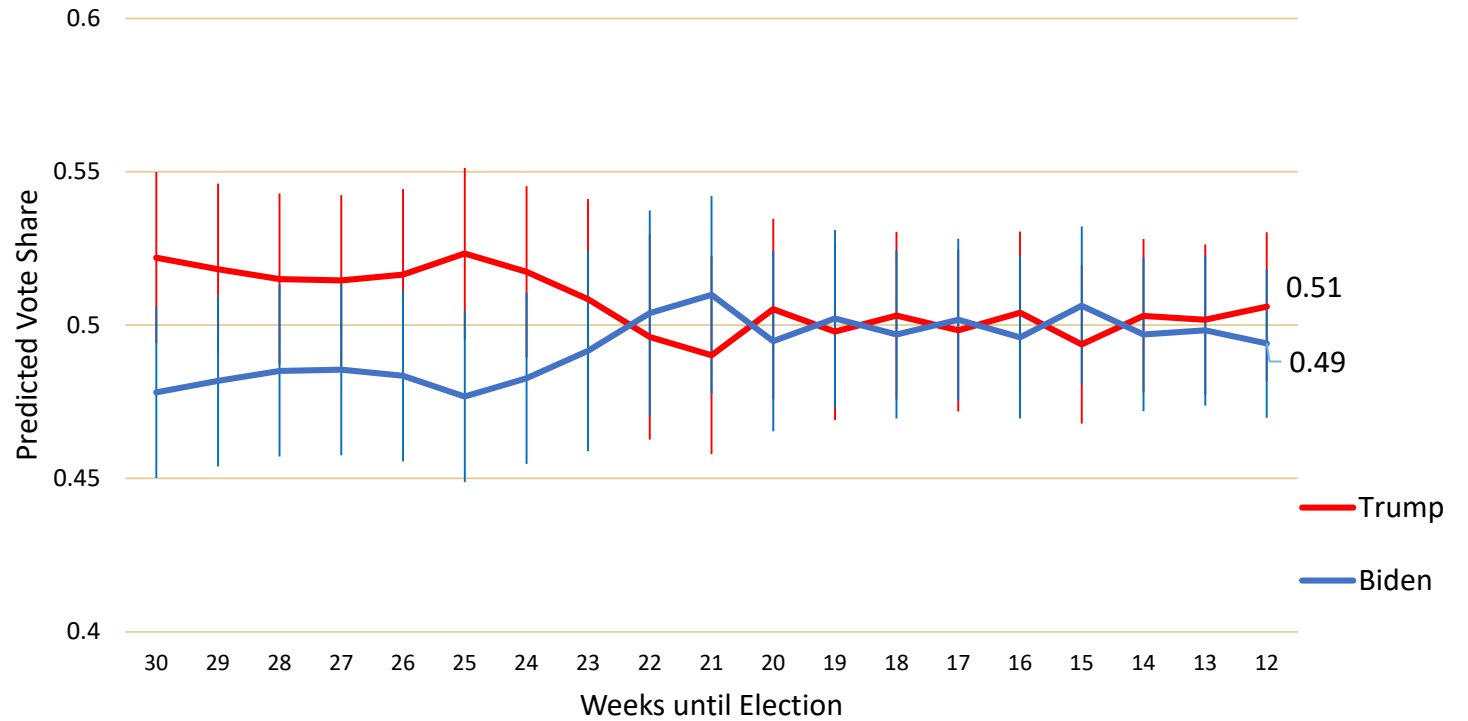
Trump's chance of winning: 43%

(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 47.3 – 51.8%

(80% prediction intervals)

Texas

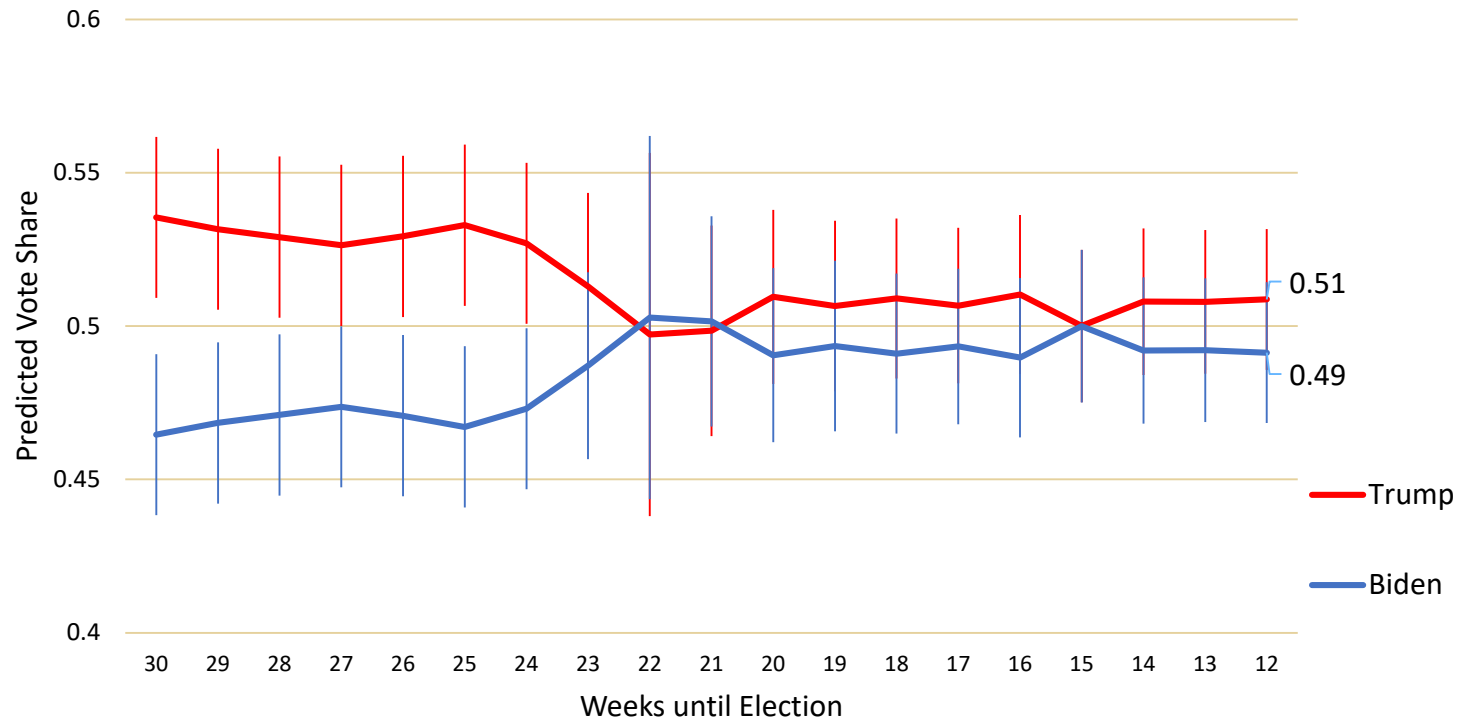
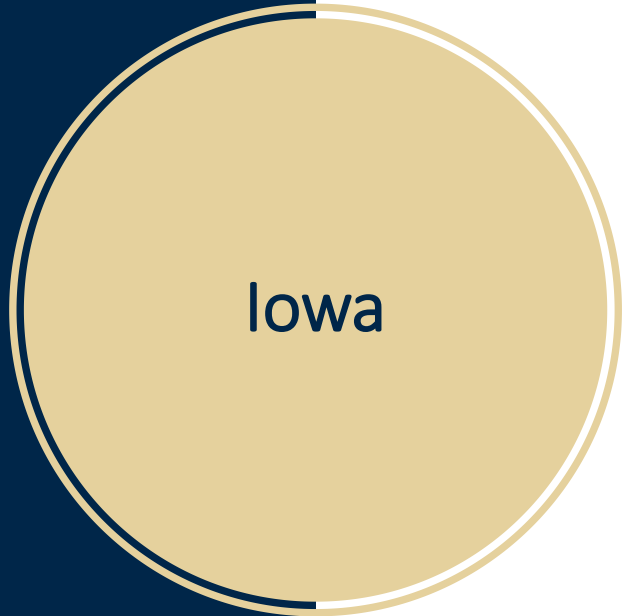


Trump’s chance of winning: 57%
(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 48.2 – 53.0%
(80% prediction intervals)

States Likely to Go to Incumbent

Presented in order of most to least competitive.



Trump's chance of winning: 64%

(1M simulations)

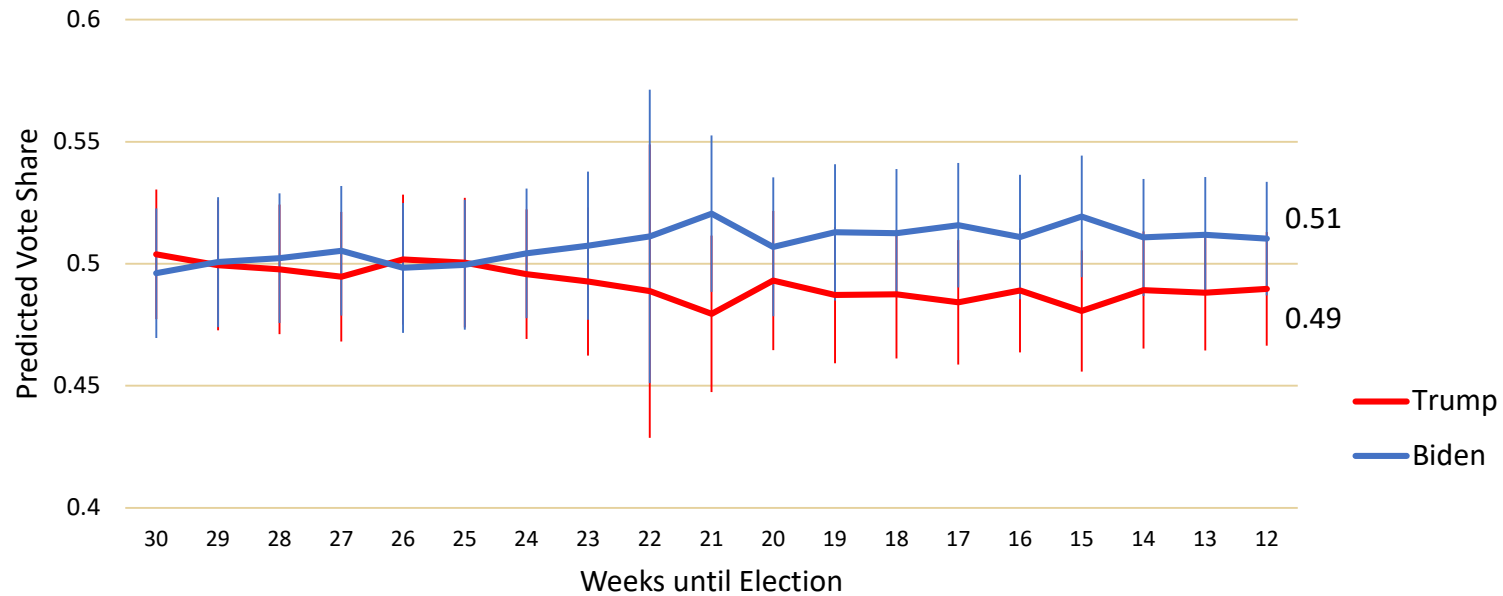
Likely popular vote: 48.6 – 53.2%

(80% prediction intervals)

States Likely to Go to Challenger

Presented in order of most to least competitive.

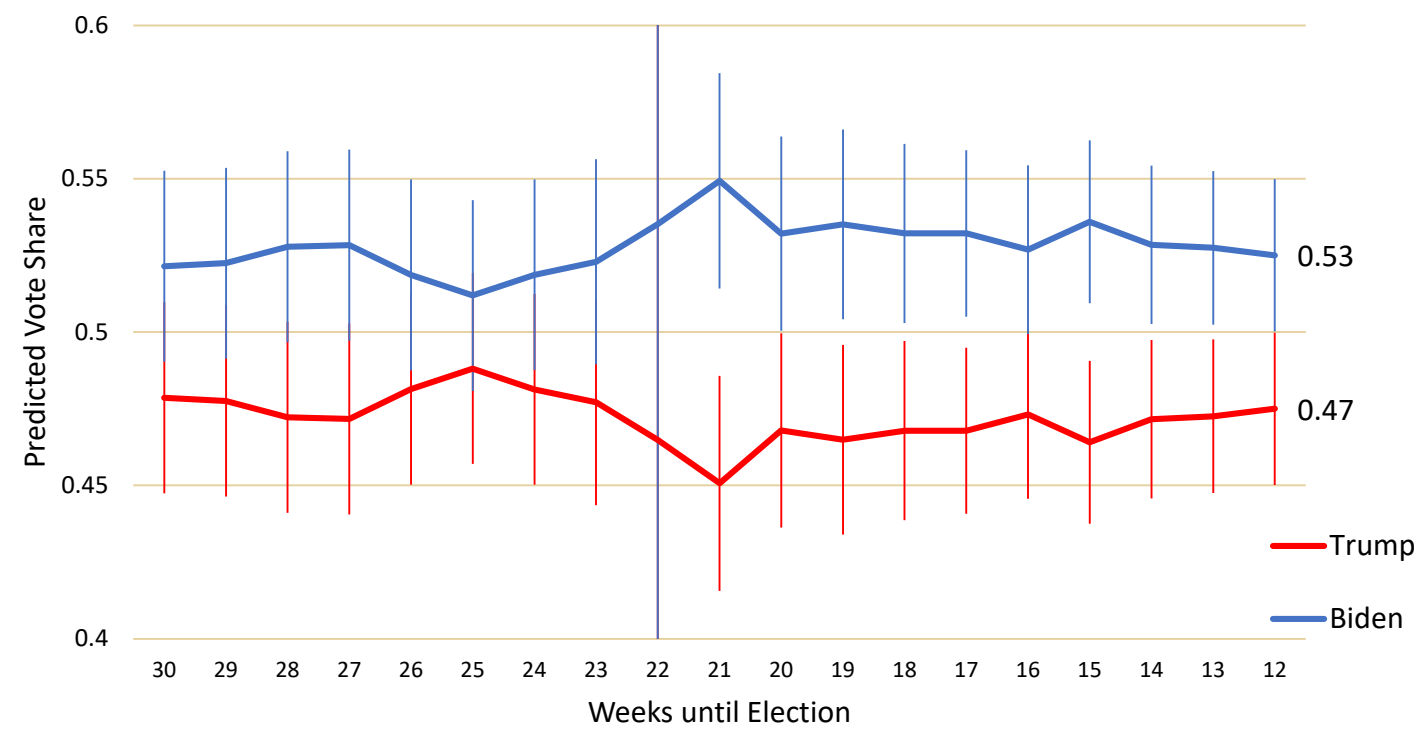
North Carolina



Trump’s chance of winning: 36%
(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 46.6 – 51.3%
(80% prediction intervals)

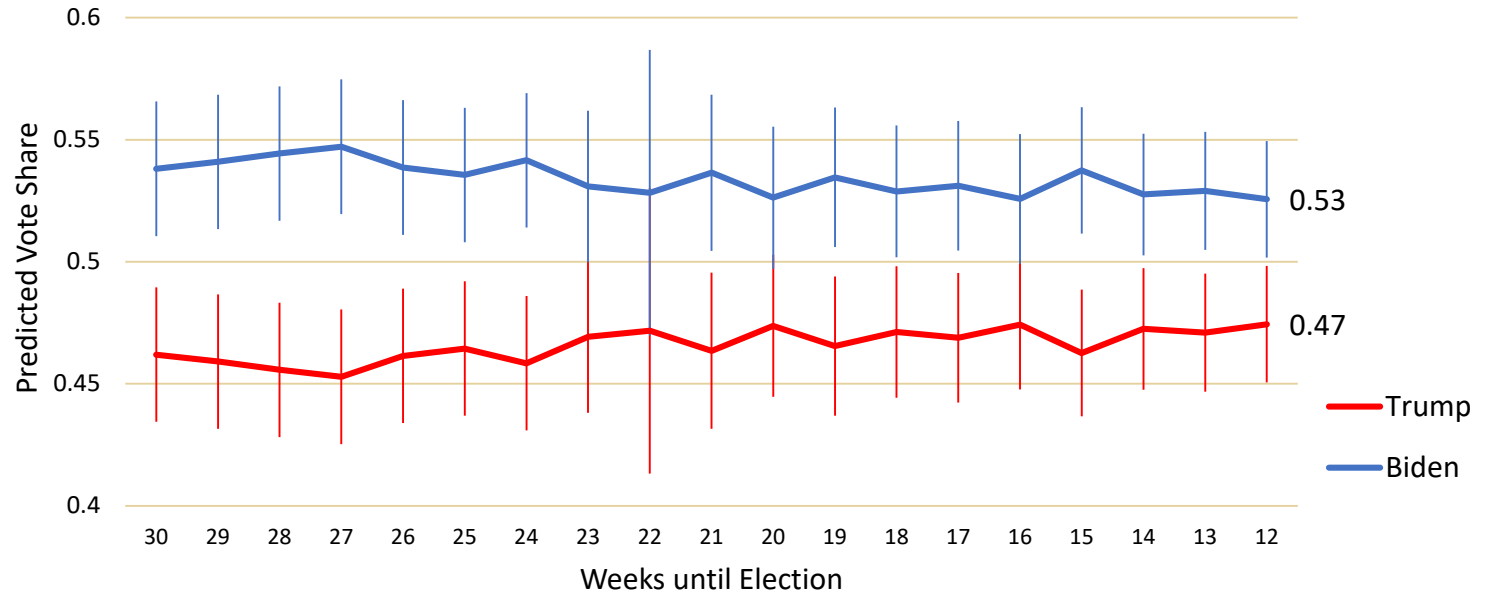
Nevada



Trump's chance of winning: 25%
(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 45.0 – 50.0%
(80% prediction intervals)

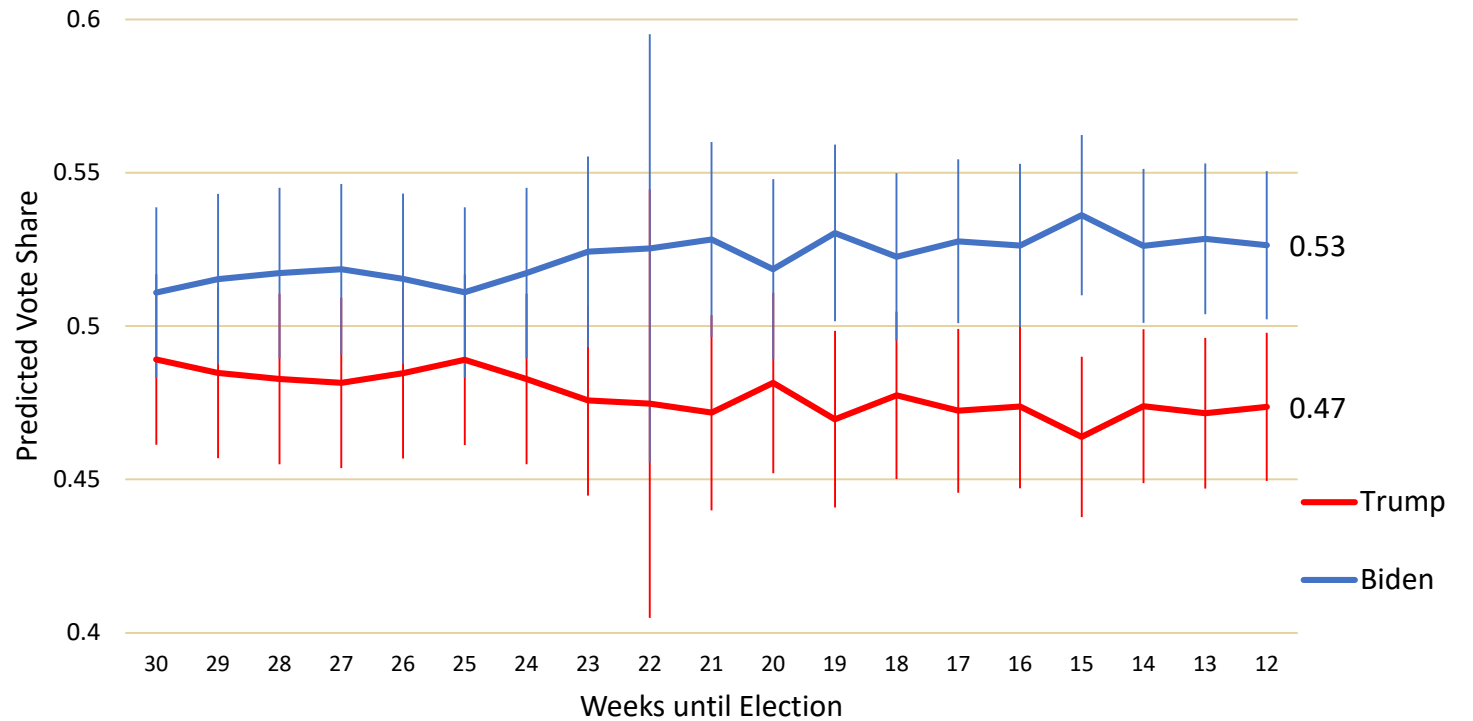
Arizona



Trump’s chance of winning: 21%
(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 45.1 – 49.8%
(80% prediction intervals)

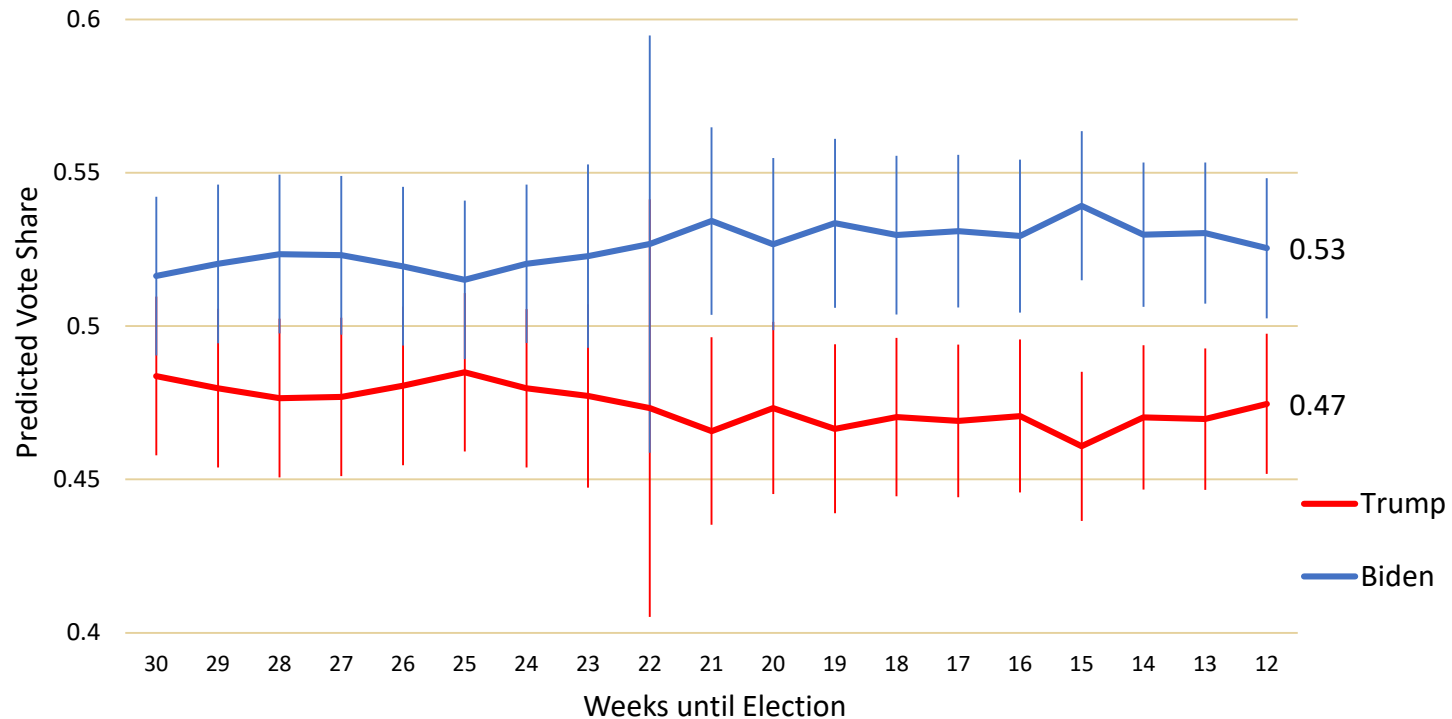
Pennsylvania



Trump’s chance of winning: 21%
(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 44.9 – 49.8%
(80% prediction intervals)

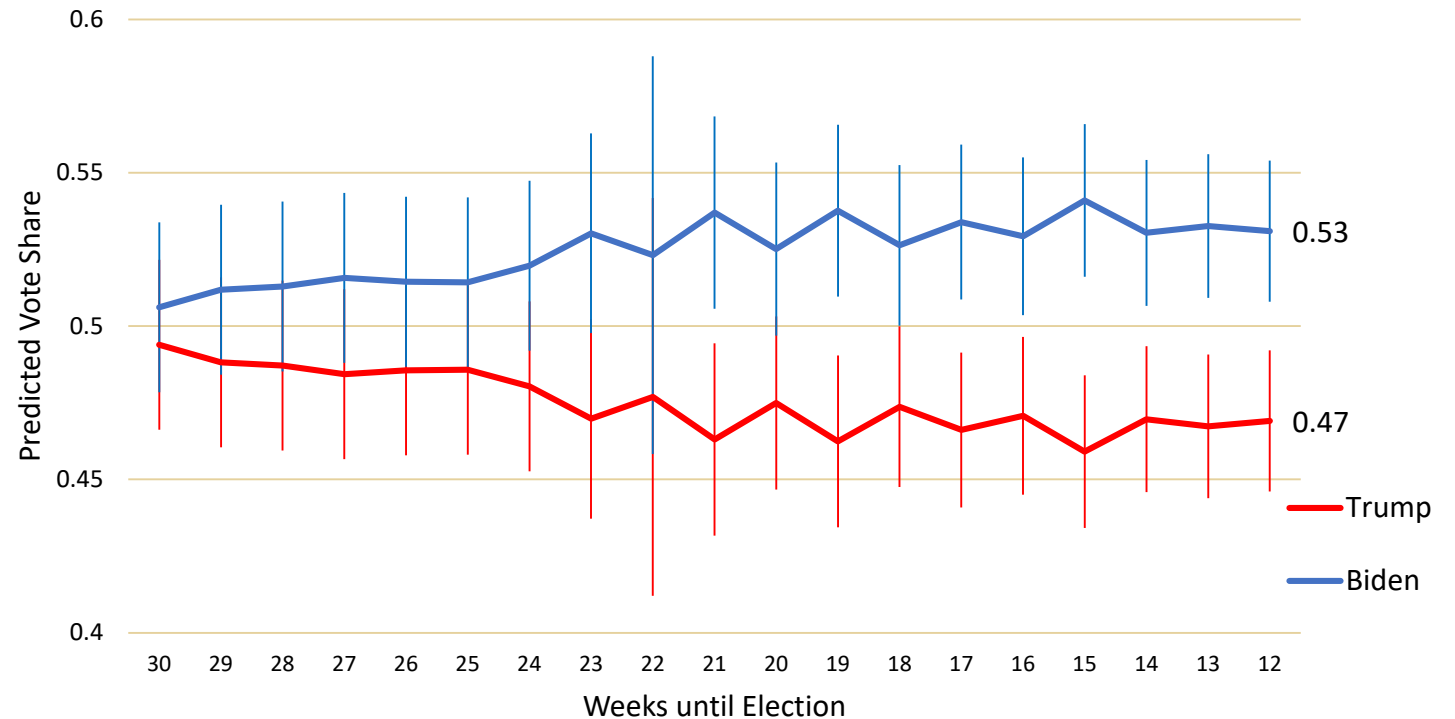
Florida



Trump’s chance of winning: 20%
(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 45.2 – 49.7%
(80% prediction intervals)

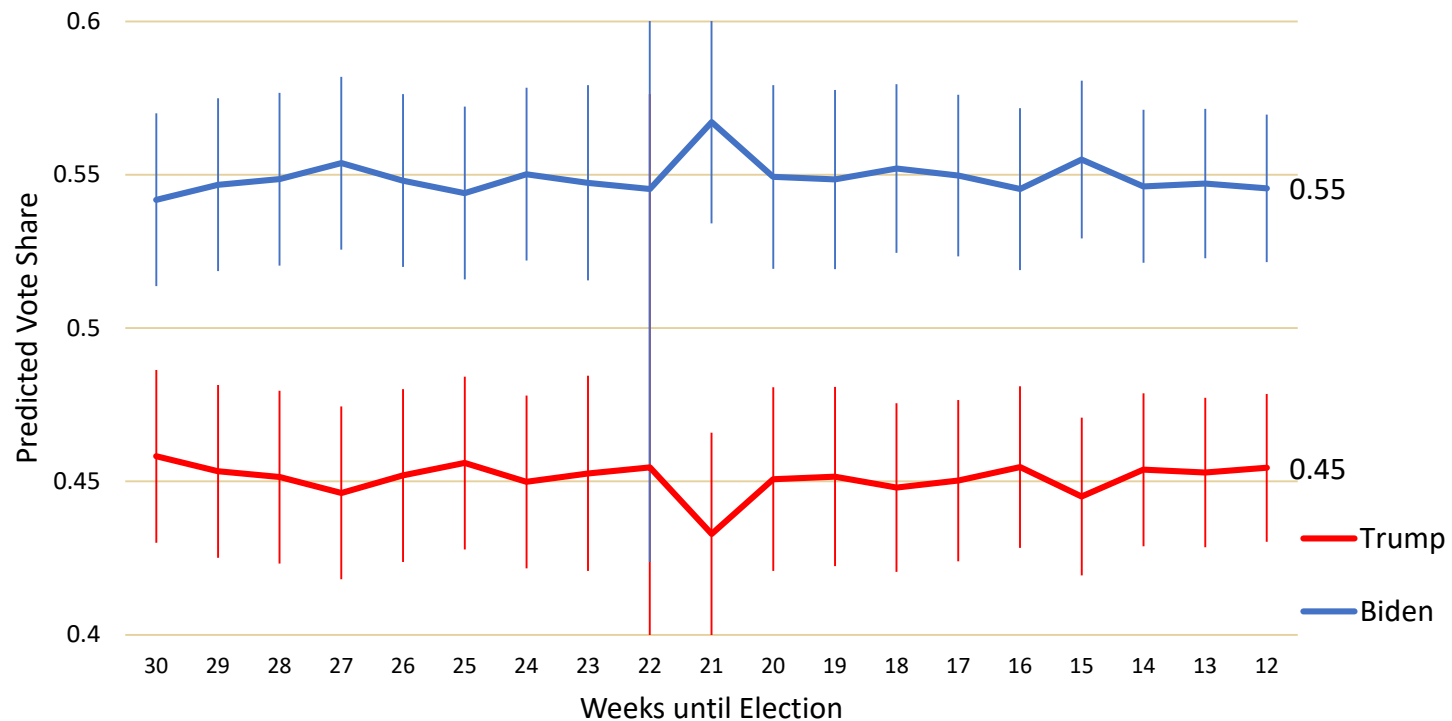
Wisconsin



Trump's chance of winning: 15%
(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 44.6 – 49.2%
(80% prediction intervals)

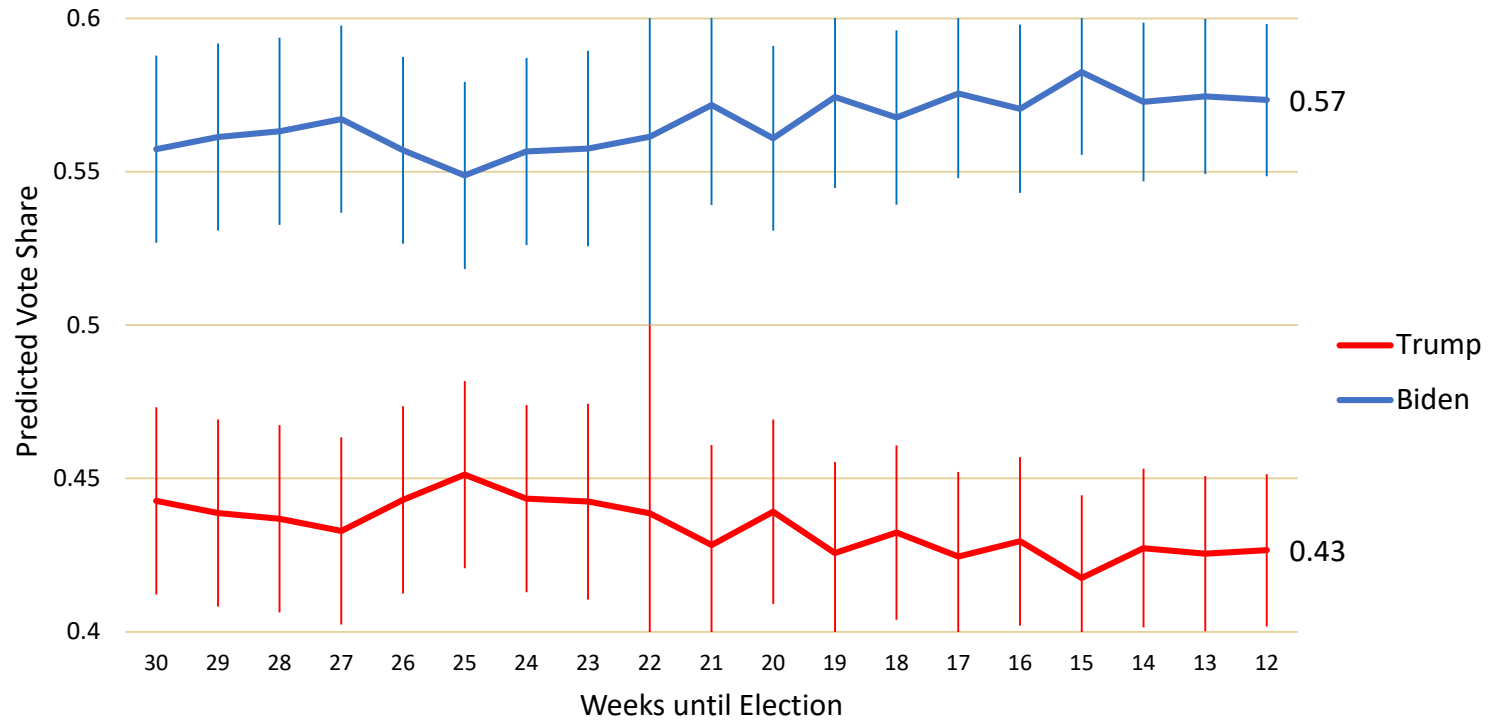
Michigan



Trump’s chance of winning: 8%
(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 43.0 – 47.9%
(80% prediction intervals)

Colorado



Trump's chance of winning: 2%
(1M simulations)

Likely popular vote: 40.2 – 45.1%
(80% prediction intervals)

Equation Information: 2020

Note: This is only with current data and will be updated throughout the project until election day.

Table 1

Abbreviated summary of the mixed model with autoregressive regressive correlation 2020

| Term | Estimate | SE | Statistic |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
| (intercept) | 0.503** | 0.009 | 56.408 |
| Week | -0.003 | 0.000 | -0.899 |
| Negative Mentions | 0.158 | 0.140 | 1.131 |
| Interaction | | | |
| State lean | 0.364* | 0.143 | 2.538 |
| Favorability | 0.061* | 0.030 | 2.081 |
| Difference | | | |
| Difference from Jan | -0.000 | 0.000 | -0.559 |
| Unemployment | | | |
| AR(1) | 0.439 | NA | NA |
| AR(2) | -0.023 | NA | NA |
| AR(3) | -0.031 | NA | NA |
| AR(4) | -0.011 | NA | NA |
| rnd state | 0.018 | NA | NA |
| sd_(Intercept) | | | |
| rnd state residual | 0.017 | NA | NA |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Per state random effects 2020

| State | (intercept) |
|--------------|--------------------|
| AZ | -0.019 |
| CO | -0.030 |
| FL | -0.007 |
| GA | 0.017 |
| IA | 0.025 |
| MI | -0.006 |
| NV | 0.017 |
| NC | 0.002 |
| OH | -0.004 |
| PA | 0.012 |
| TX | 0.009 |
| WI | -0.016 |

Equation
Information:
2016

Table 3

Abbreviated summary of the mixed model with autoregressive regressive correlation 2016

| Term | Estimate | SE | Statistic |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
| (intercept) | 0.525** | 0.010 | 54.422 |
| Week | -0.010** | 0.000 | -3.869 |
| Negative Mentions | 0.080 | 0.253 | 0.315 |
| Interaction | | | |
| State lean | 0.816** | 0.216 | 3.777 |
| Favorability | 0.061* | 0.024 | 2.562 |
| Difference | | | |
| Difference from Jan | -0.049* | 0.019 | -2.520 |
| Unemployment | | | |
| AR(1) | 0.362 | NA | NA |
| AR(2) | 0.079 | NA | NA |
| AR(3) | 0.031 | NA | NA |
| AR(4) | 0.059 | NA | NA |
| rnd state | 0.019 | NA | NA |
| sd_(Intercept) | | | |
| rnd state residual | 0.023 | NA | NA |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4

Per state random effects 2016

| State | (intercept) |
|--------------|--------------------|
| AZ | -0.012 |
| CO | 0.030 |
| FL | -0.013 |
| GA | -0.019 |
| IA | 0.016 |
| MI | 0.004 |
| NV | -0.004 |
| NC | -0.018 |
| OH | -0.010 |
| PA | 0.001 |
| TX | -0.001 |
| WI | 0.025 |

Equation
Information:
2012

Table 5

Abbreviated table summarizing the mixed model with autoregressive regressive correlation 2012

| Term | Estimate | SE | Statistic |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
| (intercept) | 0.517** | 0.008 | 62.760 |
| Week | -0.000* | 0.000 | -1.998 |
| Negative Mentions | -0.199 | 0.155 | -1.282 |
| Interaction | | | |
| State lean | 0.603** | 0.136 | 4.430 |
| Favorability | -0.016 | 0.014 | -1.137 |
| Difference | | | |
| Difference from Jan | 0.015 | 0.012 | 1.226 |
| Unemployment | | | |
| AR(1) | 0.388 | NA | NA |
| AR(2) | 0.084 | NA | NA |
| AR(3) | -0.065 | NA | NA |
| AR(4) | -0.085 | NA | NA |
| sd_(Intercept) | 0.018 | NA | NA |
| Residual | 0.019 | NA | NA |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 6

Per state random effects 2012

| State | (intercept) |
|--------------|--------------------|
| AZ | 0.004 |
| CO | 0.029 |
| FL | -0.004 |
| GA | -0.031 |
| IA | -0.009 |
| MI | -0.014 |
| NV | 0.023 |
| NC | -0.011 |
| OH | -0.010 |
| PA | 0.006 |
| TX | -0.007 |
| WI | 0.002 |

Thanks

- Bhaskar V. Karambelkar and Fivethirtyeight for the map code and public information, see <https://rpubs.com/bhaskarvk/electoral-Map-2016>
- Brandwatch for availability of Twitter data and net sentiment analysis
- RCP and FiveThirtyEight for their polling data
- Gallup for their state lean polling

For additional questions or media inquiries, please contact Danny Parra (dparra@email.gwu.edu)

Appendix A: Explanation of Models

What Our Models Do

Our models predict the final vote share for the Presidential elections weekly.

How We Predict Vote Share

In order to predict each candidate's vote share in the battleground states, we input the latest variable data (see below) into the mixed effect regression model with an autoregressive correlation of past polls to generate an estimate as well as an upper- and lower-bound for the predicted performance of each candidate in each state. Then we created a normal distribution around the estimation with the model's error to create a probability distribution. This distribution was drawn from 1 million times to create probabilities of the candidate winning the state (specifically, greater than 50%). The state-level polling share was used as a dependent variable with each state allowed a unique slope. The model was tested using 2012 and 2016 data. The following were then used for fixed effects:

Fourth order autoregressive model of weekly state polling averages : Weekly trial-heat state-level polling averages are entered into an autoregressive model. The last four weeks are used in the model to account for possible outliers in the trial-heat polls. Polls are often aggregated to predict vote share on a state-level (Linzer, 2013; Kennedy, Wojcik, & Lazer, 2017; The Economist, FiveThirtyEight). Since 2008, more battleground state trial polls have been conducted, allowing for better accuracy (Linzer, 2013). Our measure creates a two-party vote share from the polls. For weeks without polls, this variable was not adjusted, such that it represents the last week polled. The polling data was obtained from RCP and FiveThirtyEight's state-level polling websites (for example, for Arizona: https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2020/president/az/arizona_trump_vs_biden-6807.html and <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/president-general/arizona/>)

State lean: A measurement using the year prior's Gallup results. Specifically, we took the Gallup's question reporting on whether citizens of that state consider themselves Democrat, Republican, or Independent. The incumbent's party percentage of identification or those who lean towards the party minus the challenger's party percentage was used in our model. For 2012's data, see: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/152438/states-move-gop-2011.aspx>

Interaction of mentions on Twitter and change in negative Tweets: A qualitative analysis was completed in net sentiment provided by Brandwatch. While negative Tweets indicated opposition to the candidate (on average 83%), positive Tweets did not indicate support of the candidate (on average 26%). Thus, only negative Tweets were examined. Using net sentiment was found to improve prediction of swing states (Heredia, Prusa, & Khoshgoftaar, 2018). We are specifically interested in how the change in negative Tweets influence polling vote share. This interaction involved multiplying the share of Tweets about the incumbent multiplied by the change in percent negative share of the Tweets. Although not significant in the overall model, the measure improved the prediction of the 2016 election. Additionally, the interaction term was significant in a regression model with only Twitter information. Because it has been hypothesized that Trump has changed the way candidates interact with voters (Valentino, King, & Hill, 2017), we are specifically interested if this measure again improves the model performance.

State-level unemployment change since January: Economic factors influence vote share (Abramowitz, 1988; Fair, 1978; Linzer, 2013). To measure state-level economic data, state unemployment was utilized (provided by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics). Because economic data is comparative, the change in unemployment since January of election year was used in the model.

Favorability: The polling favorability question represents character of the candidates (Cohen, 2004). This was added to our model to capture the positive and negative polling opinions on each candidate. Because Twitter data only captured negative, it was important to represent positive evaluations of the candidates. Additionally, favorability and Twitter information was compared (see next slide). Additionally, Favorability gives us a global measure across the country, while Twitter data is examined, specifically in the state. Although state-level favorability would have been preferred, the polling demonstrated inconsistency with asking this question on the state level.

Appendix B: Exploration of Twitter

- Favorability and Twitter: Are we measuring the same concept?
 - For a fair comparison of the negative sentiment compared to the favorability measure, we calculated correlations between the unfavorable rating share (unfavorable rating of incumbent divided by the unfavorable rating of both candidates) and the global negative Twitter share of the candidates.
 - Across years: $r = -0.0006$, $p = 0.9856$
 - 2012: $r = 0.1901$, $p < 0.001$
 - 2016: $r = -0.0265$, $p = 0.6157$
 - 2020 (currently): $r = -0.4184$, $p < 0.001$
 - Incumbent's percentage of unfavorable versus their negative Tweet percentage (negative Tweets divided by total Tweets about the incumbent) were compared
 - Across years: $r = 0.4283$, $p < 0.001$
 - 2012: $r = 0.0186$, $p = 0.7252$
 - 2016: $r = -0.1243$, $p = 0.0183$
 - 2020 (currently): $r = -0.0023$, $p = 0.9751$
 - The t-test indicates that the variables are not equal (2012: $t(359) = -121.72$, $p < 0.001$; 2016: $t(359) = -171.00$, $p < 0.001$).
 - Challenger's percentage of unfavorable versus their negative Tweet percentage were compared
 - Across years: $r = -0.6844$, $p < 0.001$
 - 2012: $r = 0.2607$, $p < 0.001$
 - 2016: $r = -0.2779$, $p < 0.001$
 - 2020 (currently): $r = -0.1678$, $p = 0.0243$
 - The t-test indicates that the variables are not equal (2012: $t(359) = -47.339$, $p < 0.001$; 2016: $t(359) = -161.85$, $p < 0.001$).
 - Thus, there is evidence the variables are not the same concept

Appendix B1: Additional Twitter Exploration

- Overall, the regression predicting next week's poll share with only Twitter data is significant ($F(3,920) = 15.23, p < 0.001$), with a significant interaction term between mentions and change in negative sentiment ($\beta = 0.3354, p = 0.0373$)
- Twitter mentions are negatively correlated with the state lean (2012: $r = -0.24, p < 0.001$; 2016: $r = -0.06, ns$)
- Twitter mentions and favorability are not significantly correlated (2012: $r = 0.06, ns$; 2016: $r = 0.05, ns$)