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Predicting the Unpredictable: the 2020 US Presidential Election

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Forewarning

- Given time constraints I will focus on the Presidential Election.
- BUT, the elections for US Congress (435 House and 33 Senate seats), (plus 11 Governors; 86 State legislative chambers in 44 states, or 5,876 legislators; 78 State Supreme Court seats across 35 states; 29 Mayors and 56 other positions (of the 100 largest cities); local elections across 3,141 counties plus other jurisdictions; and 120 ballot measures* across 32 states) are vitally important.
- Control of House & Senate will set federal government's policy tone just as much as Presidential election.

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Tonight's talk: 2020 Presidential Election

- U.S. Political Climate
 - Polarisation and partisan sorting
- The Candidates
 - Different views for different Americas
- State of the Race
 - Polls and Voting
- Predicting the outcome?
 - Known unknowns and unknown unknowns
- After 3 November...
 - It won't be over until it is over (and even then it might not be over)

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US Political climate: Right Direction/Wrong Direction

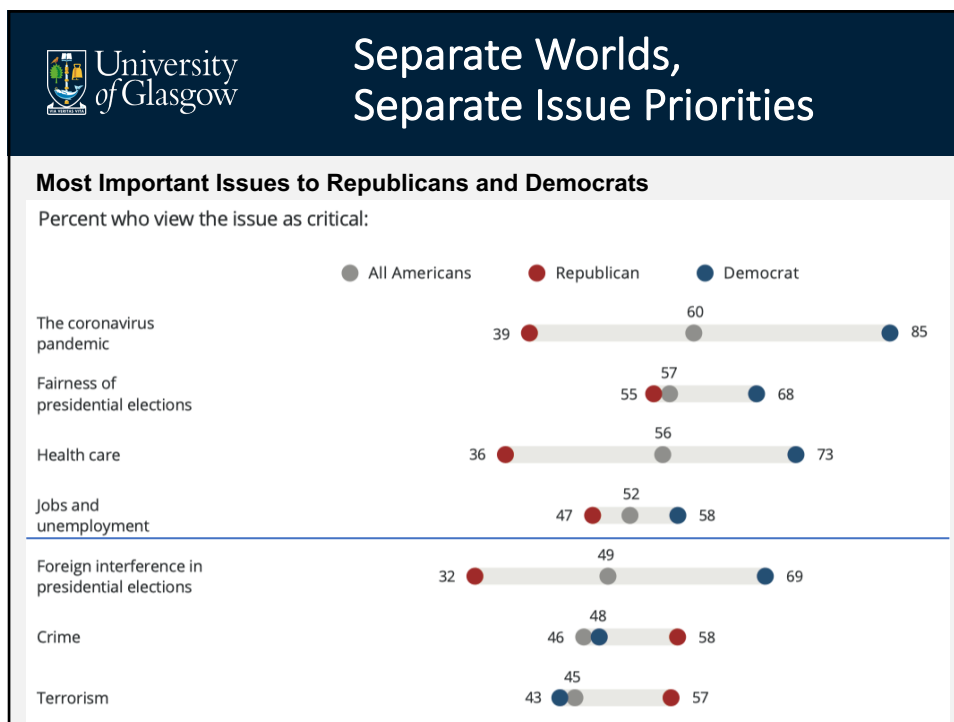
- 67% say the US is heading in the 'wrong direction' with only 32% saying it is heading in the 'right direction'
 - In 2016 it was 74% wrong direction and 25% right direction

Percent saying country going in Right Direction, 2020	
Republicans (all)	66%
Republicans who watch Fox News	79%
Republicans who watch other news source	58%
Independents	26%
Democrats	10%

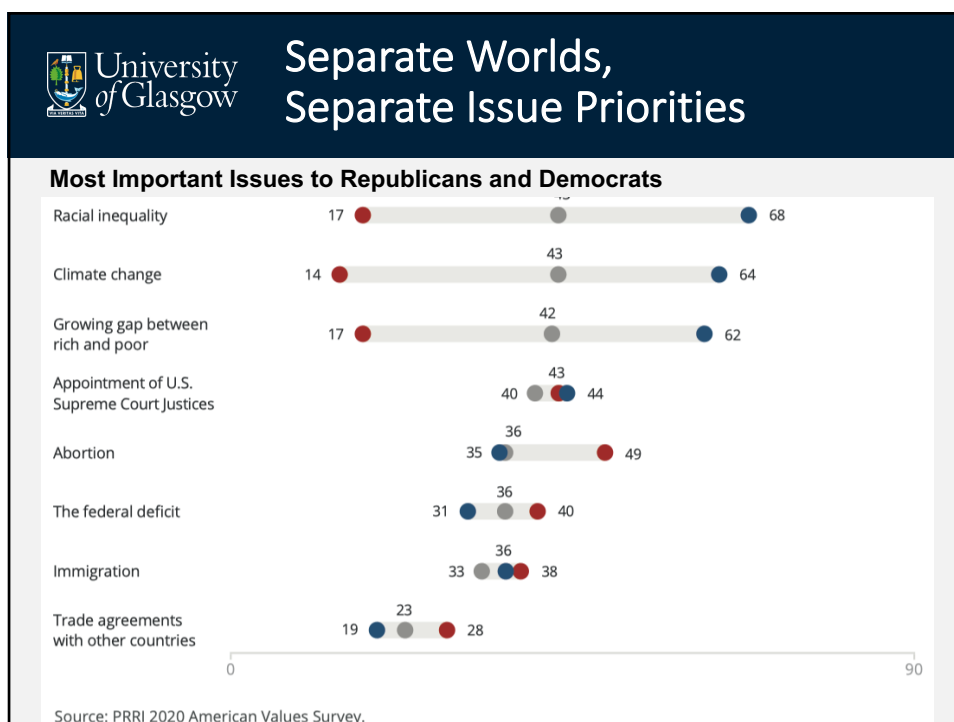
- Republicans and Democrats have *very* different views about the state of the U.S.

PRRI 2020 American Values Survey

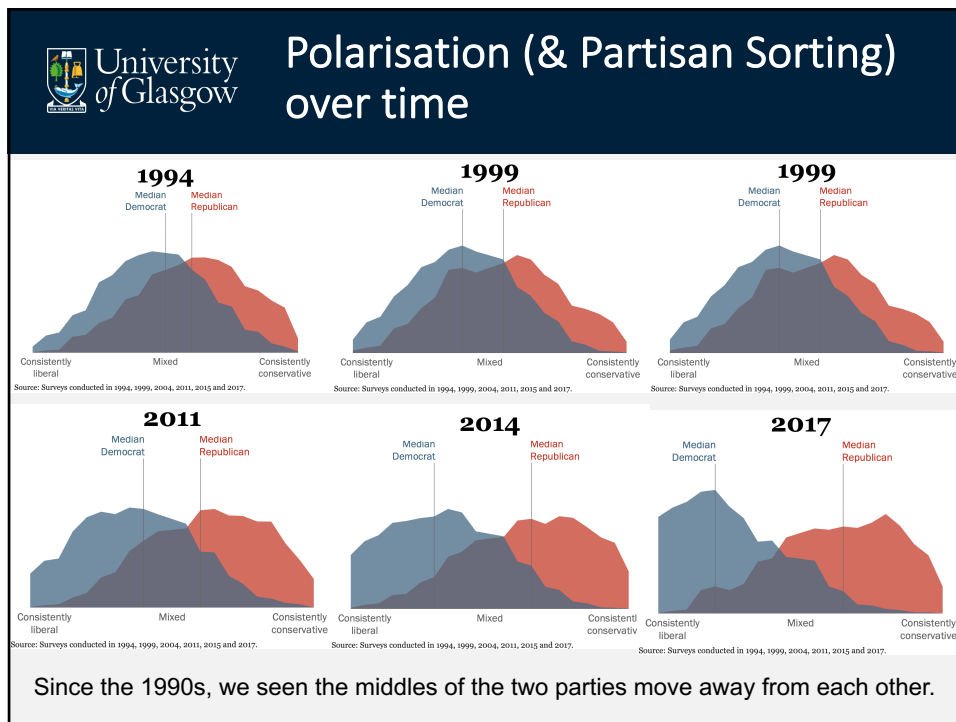
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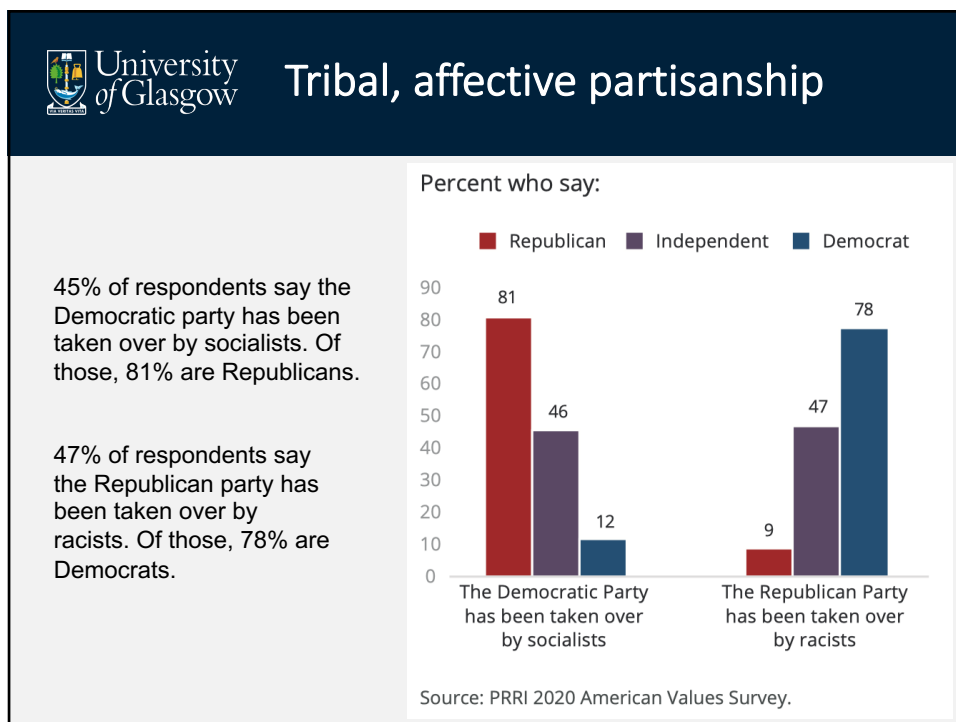
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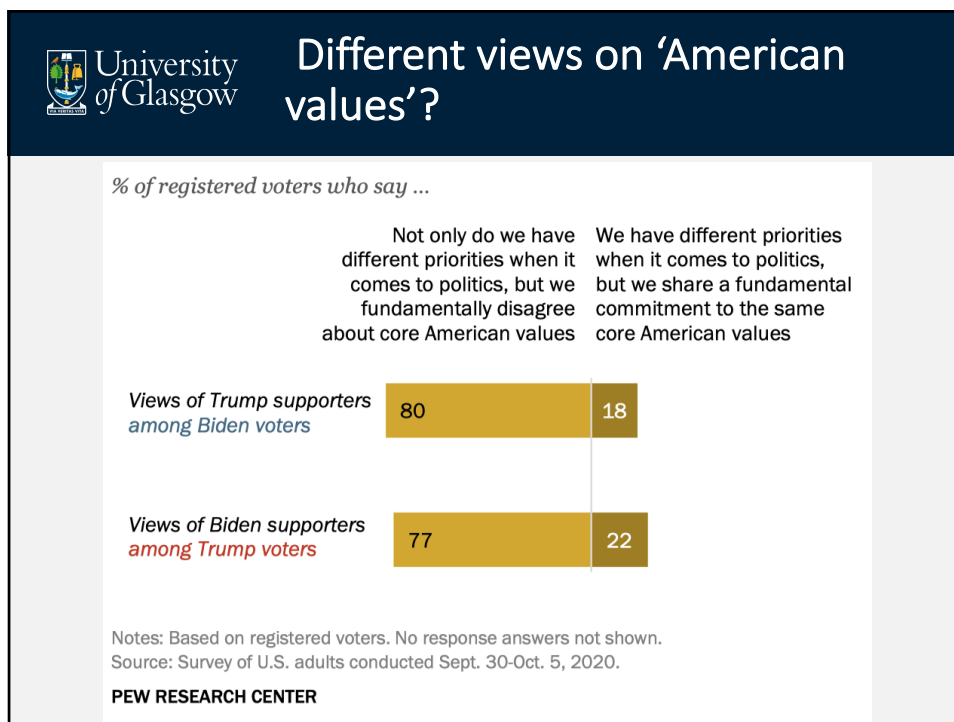
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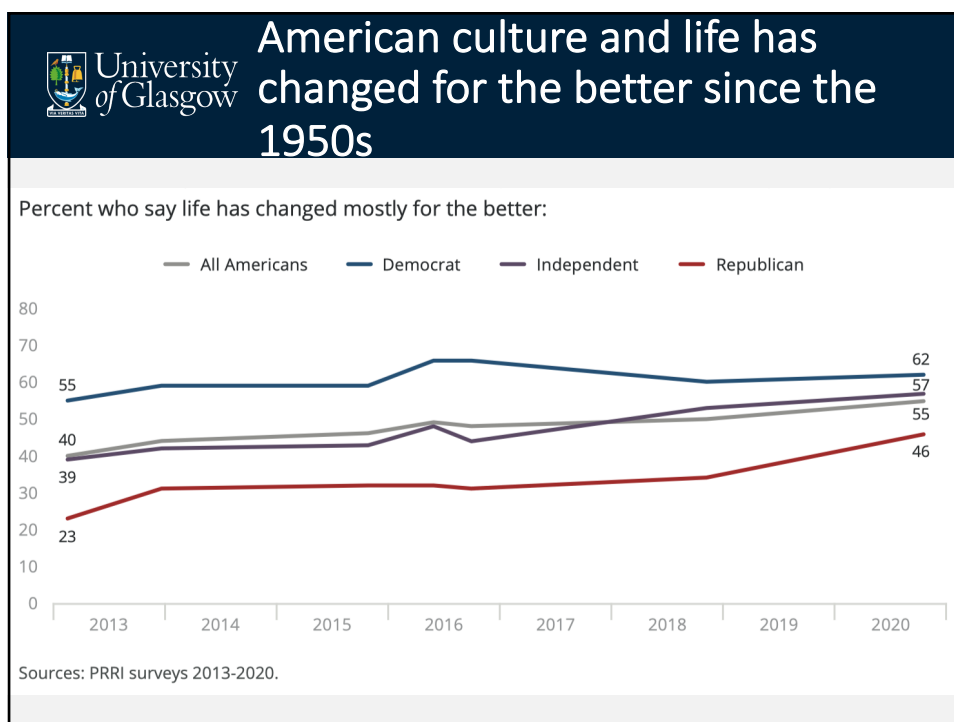
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University of Glasgow **The Candidates**



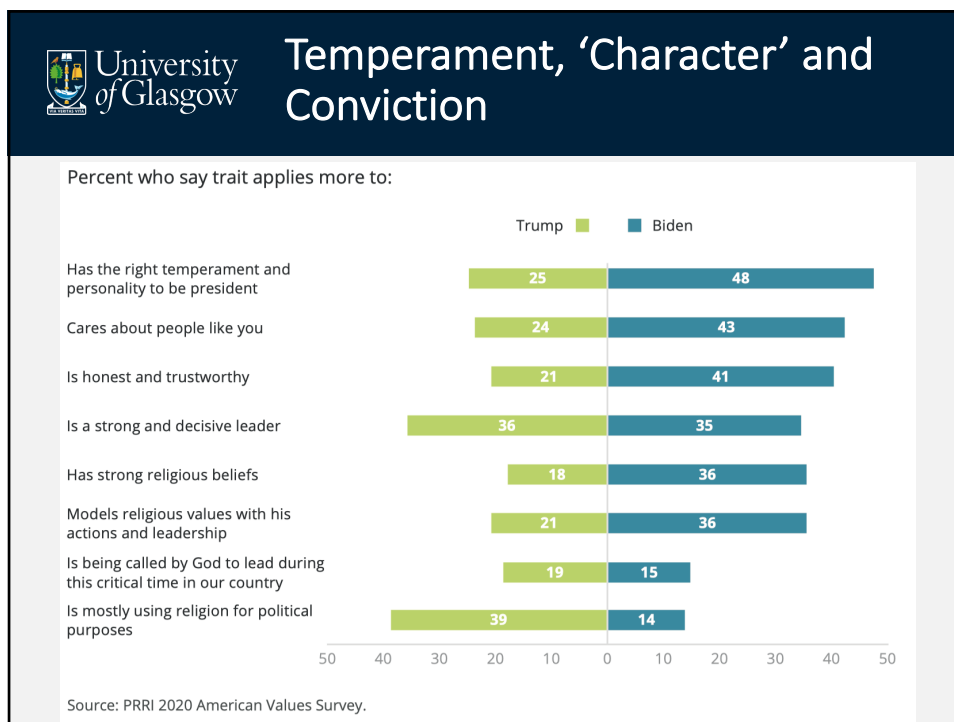
Photos from the official campaign websites

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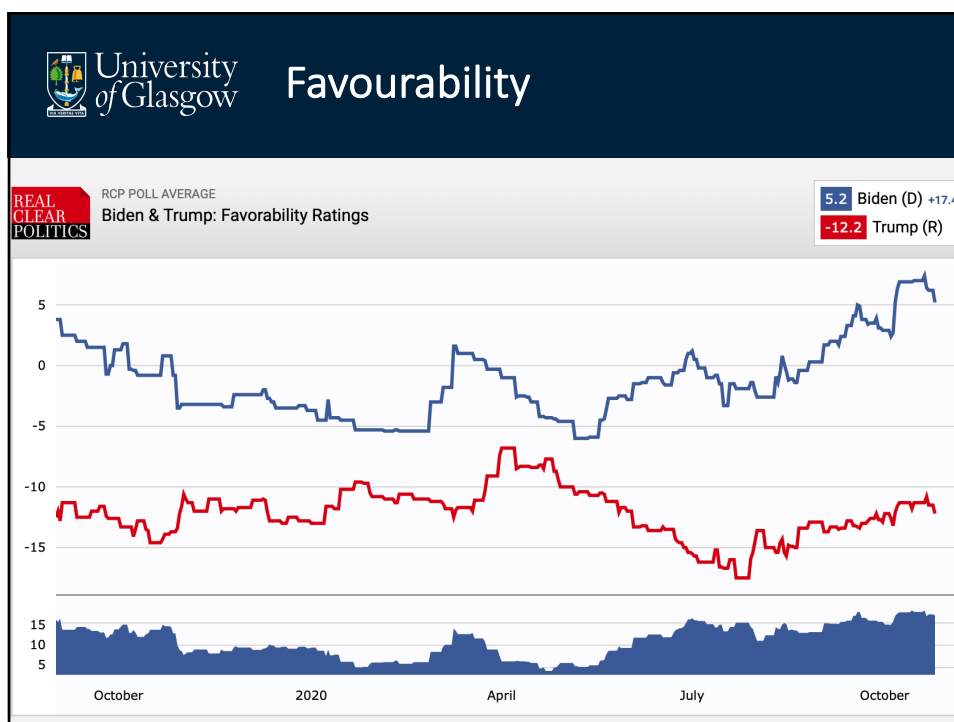
University of Glasgow **Different Visions for the U.S.: two examples**

Biden	Trump
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coronavirus: mass testing; open to national mandatory mask rule; impact on communities of colour.• Climate change: net carbon zero by 2050; power sector carbon neutral by 2035; invest in green economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coronavirus: vaccine by end of year. (No detailed plan released)• Climate change: roll back regulations; support oil & gas industries; supports clean air, but denied climate change science

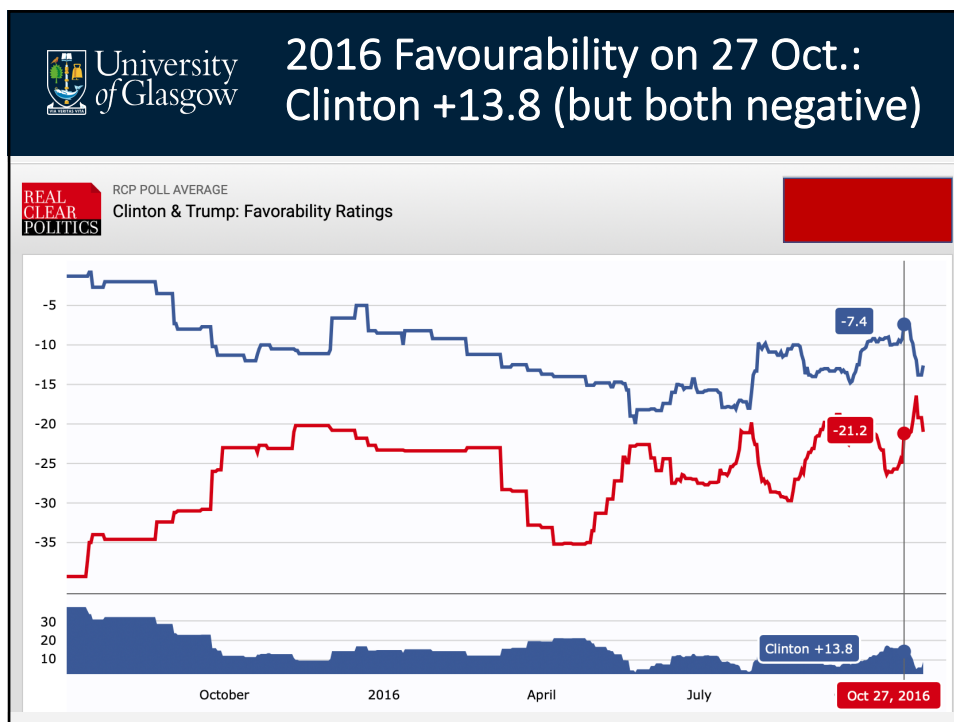
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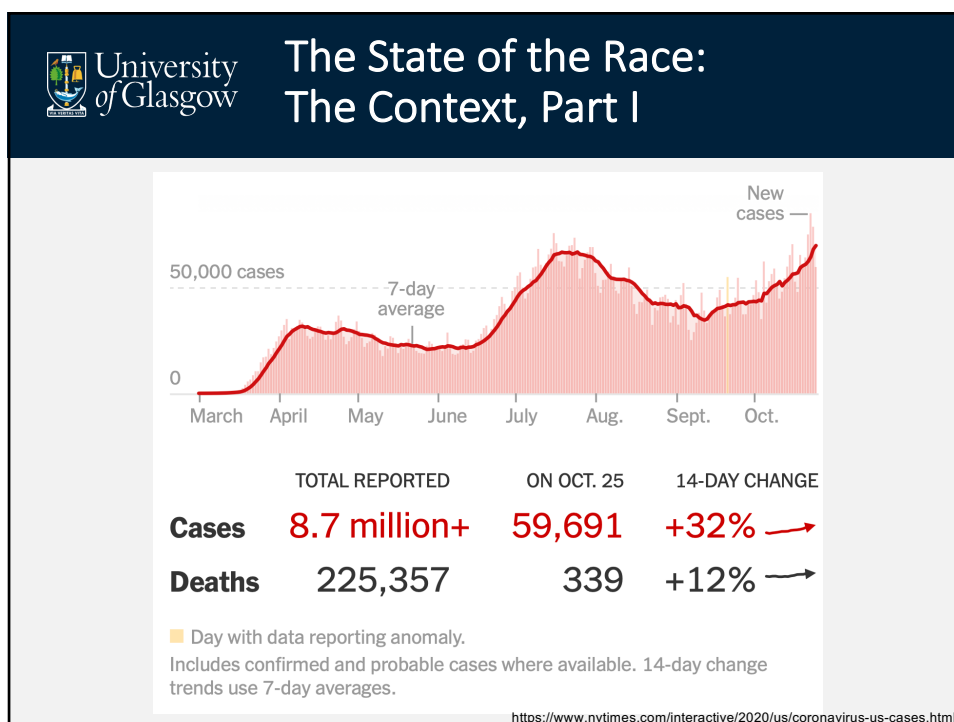
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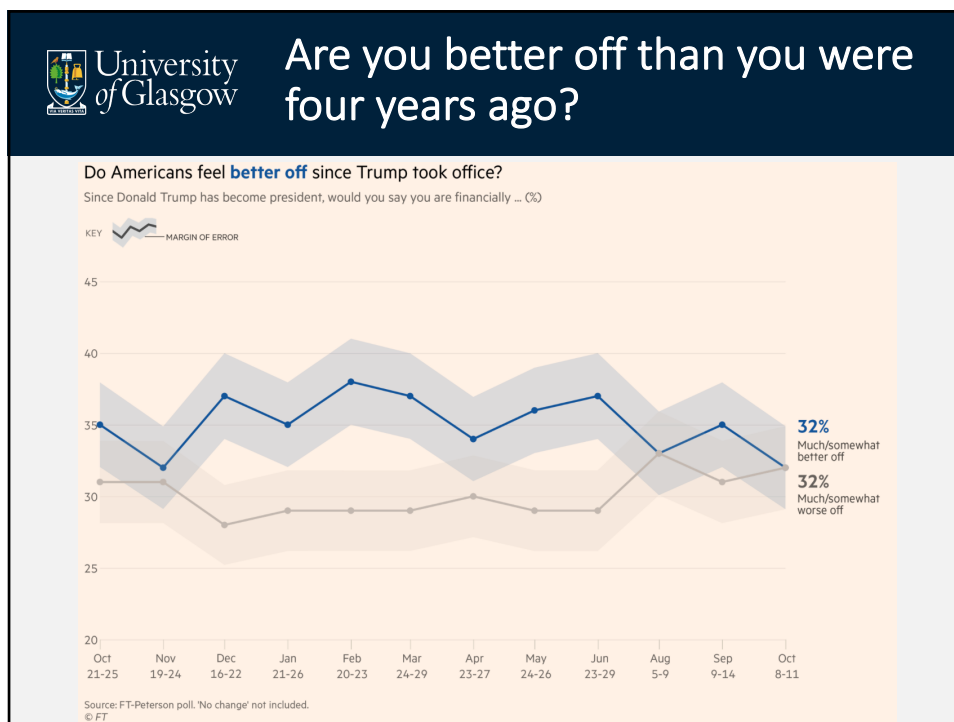
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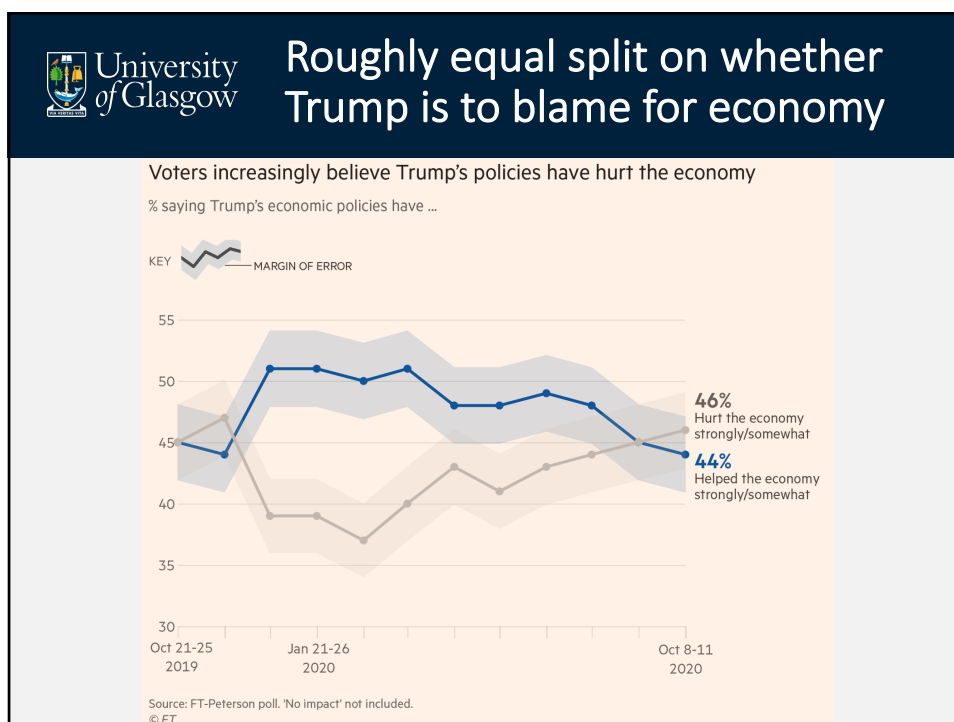
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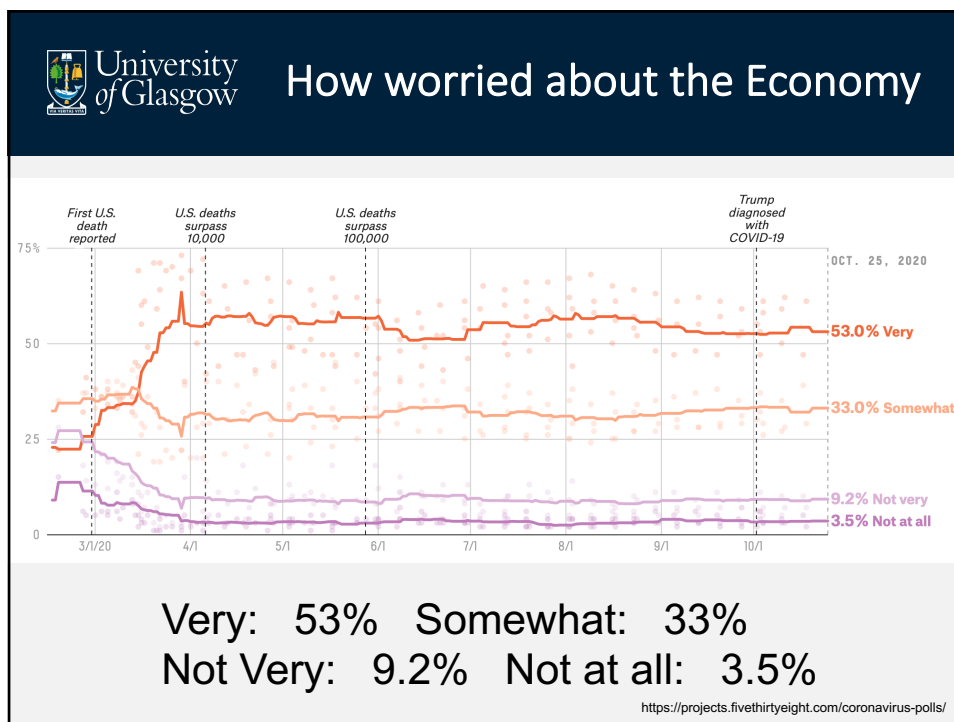
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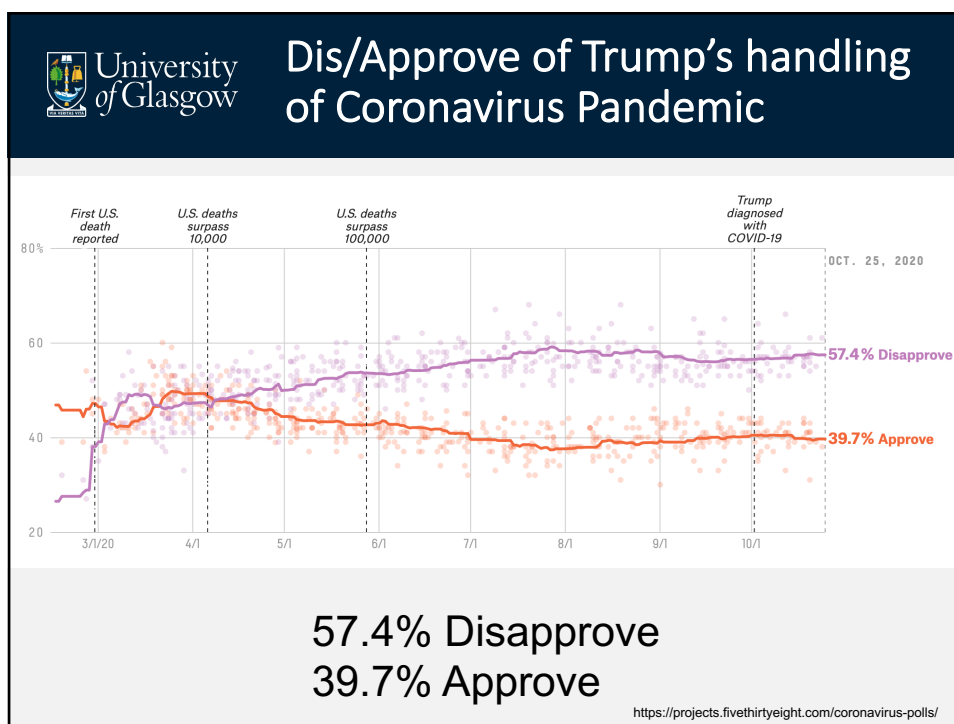
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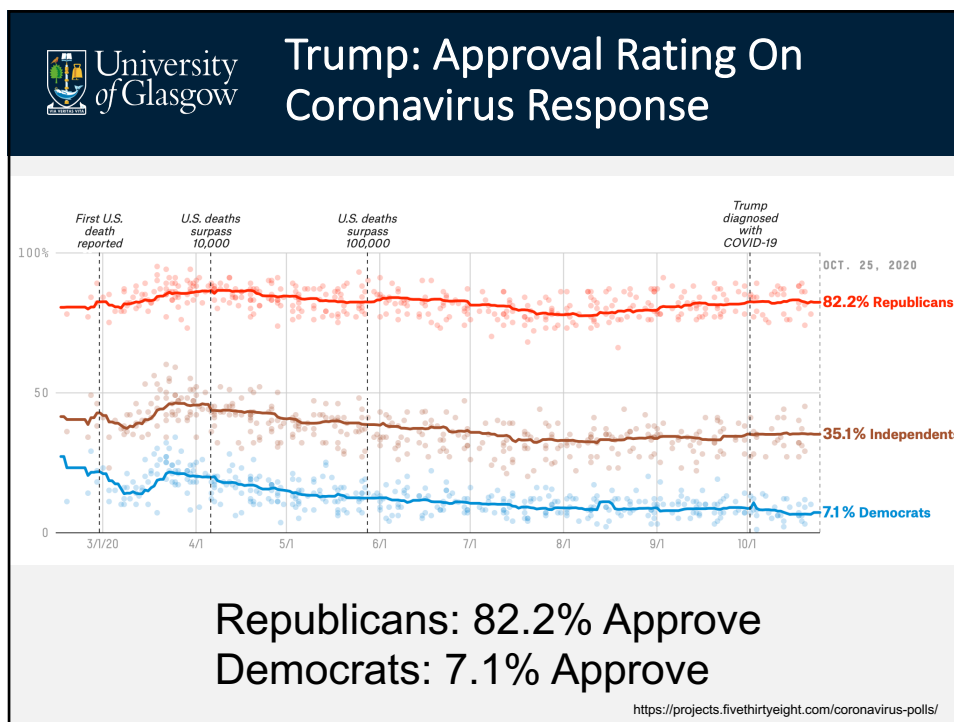
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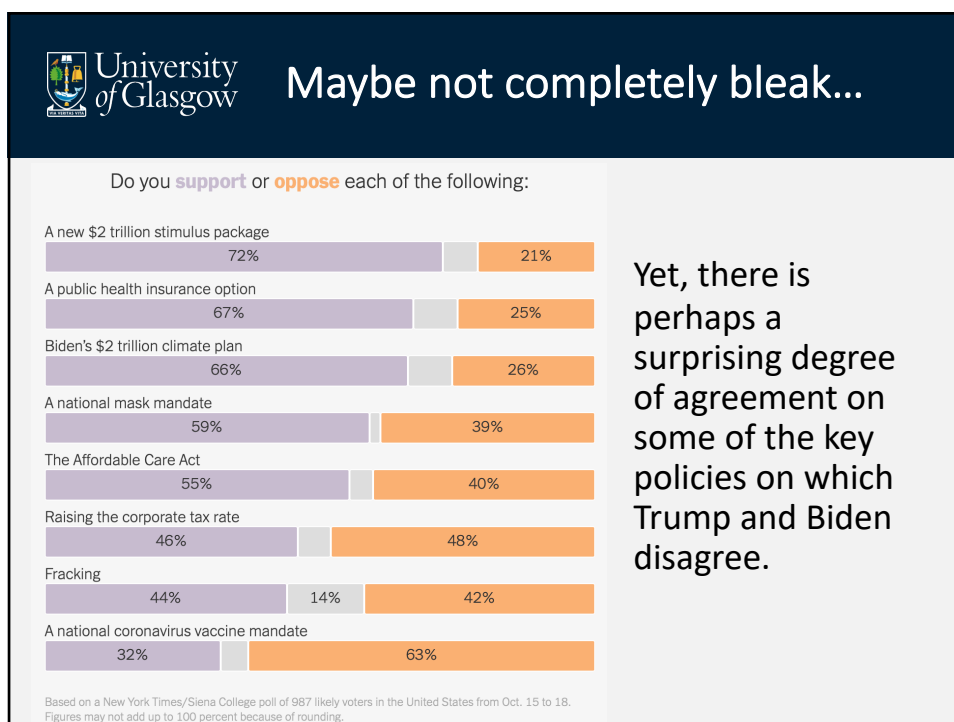
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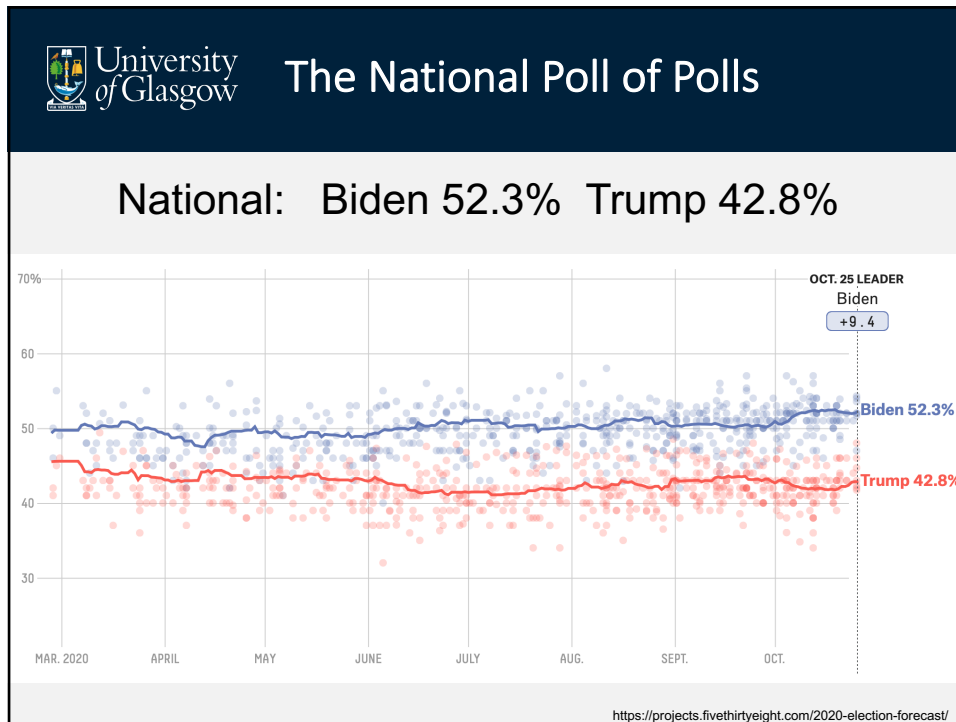
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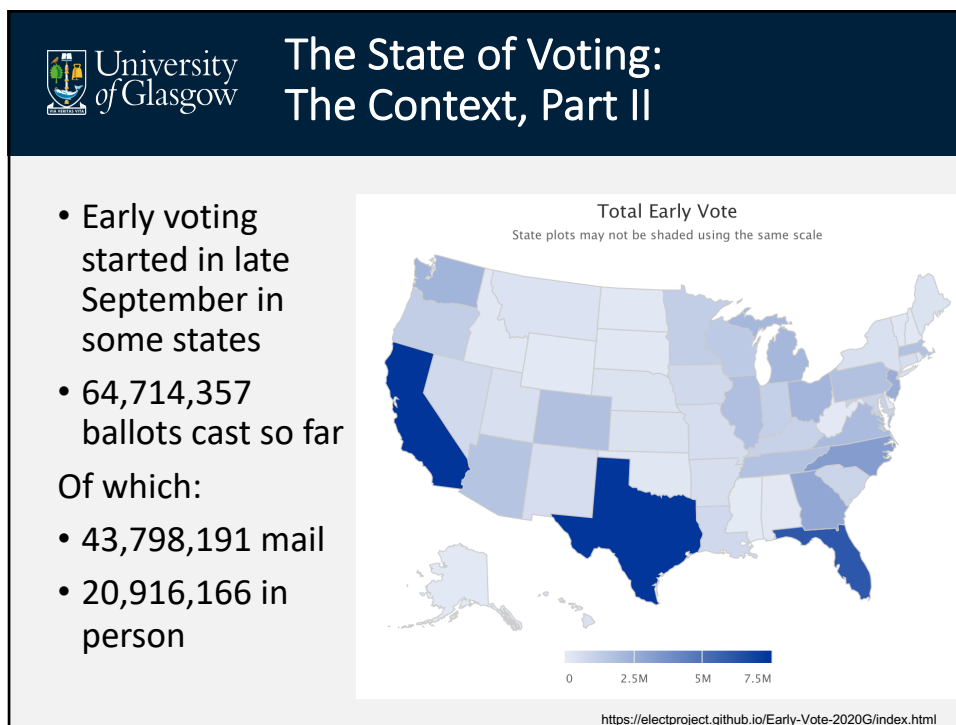
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Enthusiasm Gap? Or Scepticism about Mail in Ballots?

Total early votes, by party*			Returned by Mail Ballots, by party*		
Party	Count	Percent	Party	Returned Ballots	Freq. Distribution
Democrats	14,907,377	48.9	Democrats	12,383,402	52.2
Republicans	8,639,853	28.4	Republicans	5,852,222	24.7
Minor	186,837	0.6	Minor	145,489	0.6
No Party Affiliation	6,734,779	22.1	No Party Affiliation	5,356,701	22.6
TOTAL	30,468,846	100.0	TOTAL	23,737,814	100.0

*Reporting states with party registration data: CA, CO, CT, FL, IA, KS, KY, MD, ME, NC, NE, NJ, NM, NV, OK, OR, PA, SD

So far, Democrats have been voting at much higher rate (in states that record party of voter). Does this leave their mail votes vulnerable to more challenges? Why are Republicans not voting early?

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Trump supporters plan to vote on 3 Nov

% of registered voters who support ...

	Trump/ Lean Trump	Biden/ Lean Biden	NET Other
All voters	42	52	6
<i>Method of voting*</i>			
In person BEFORE Election Day	40	55	4
By mail	27	69	4
In person ON Election Day	63	31	6

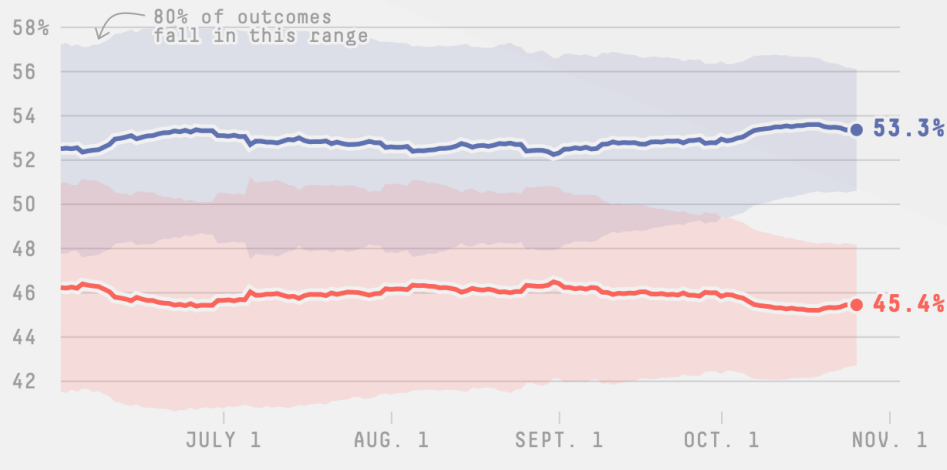
*Method of voting categories include those who have already voted.
 Notes: Based on registered voters. No answer responses not shown. "Other" candidates include those who say they are voting for Jorgensen, Hawkins or someone else.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 30-Oct. 5, 2020.

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Predicting the result: National Popular Vote

Most models have Biden winning the national popular vote.



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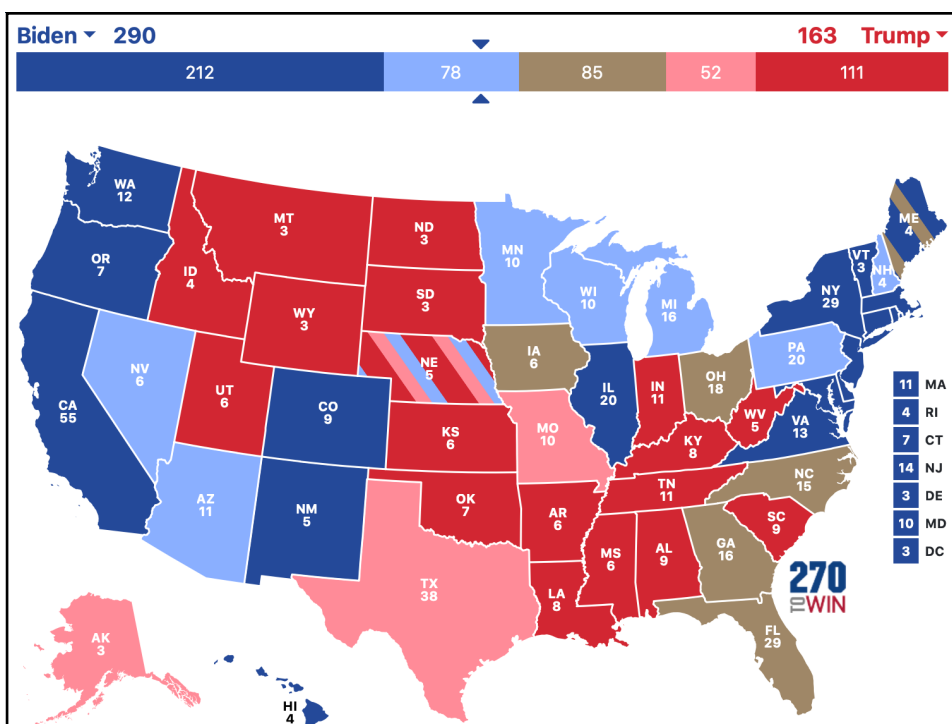
U.S. Electoral College

- Presidents elected by the Electoral College (so national popular vote does not determine outcome)
- Each state receives number of electoral votes equal to number of Representatives in House of Representatives (based on population) plus 2 (for Senators)
- Total number of Electoral College votes = 538
- **270 votes needed to win!**
- If the outcome is tied (269-269), the House of Representatives votes by state delegation

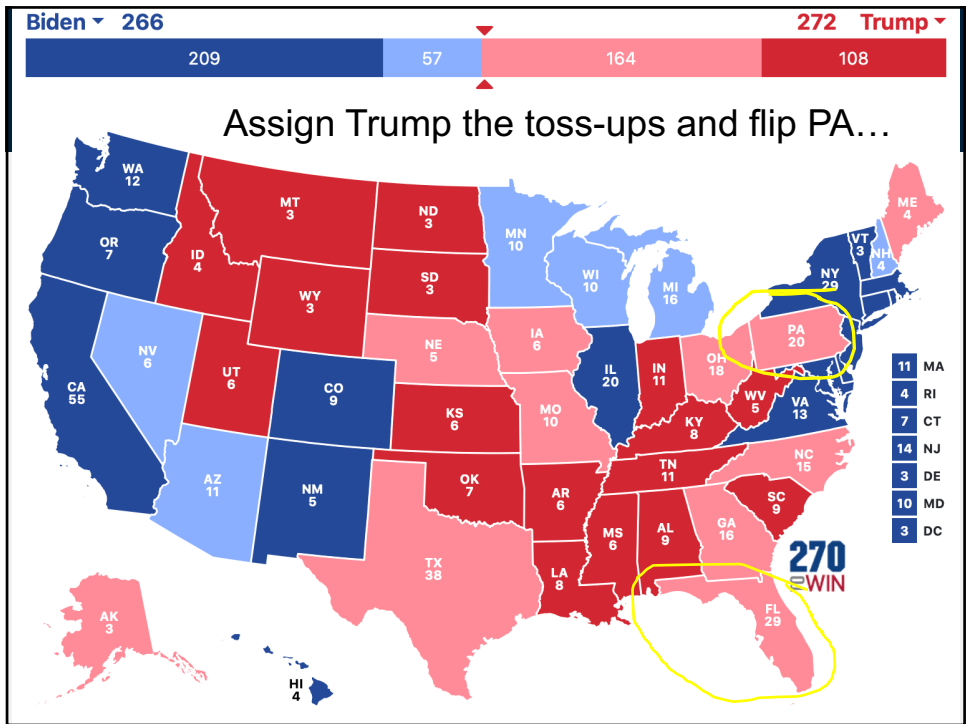
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PREDICTING ELECTORAL COLLEGE	Biden	Trump	Toss Up
FiveThirtyEight (Silver et al.)	344	194	
270toWin Aggregate	290	163	85
270toWin Polls forecast	279	125	134
Crystal Ball (Larry Sabato)	290	163	85
Cook Political Report	290	163	85
Inside Elections	319	163	56
The Economist (Gelman)	352	186	
CNN	290	163	85
Politico	279	179	80
NPR	290	163	85
US News	290	185	63
ABC News	290	163	85
Real Clear Politics*	232	125	181
Niskanen Center	318	123	97
Princeton Elections Project	335	143	60
JHK Forecasts	335	163	40
Predicitt Market Probabilities	290	248	-

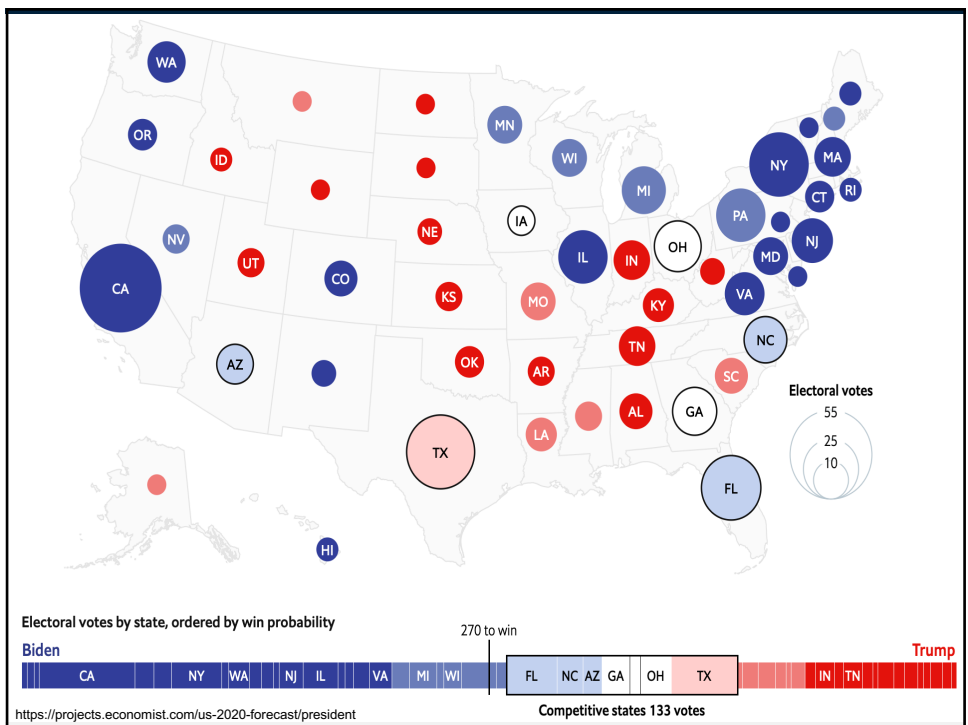
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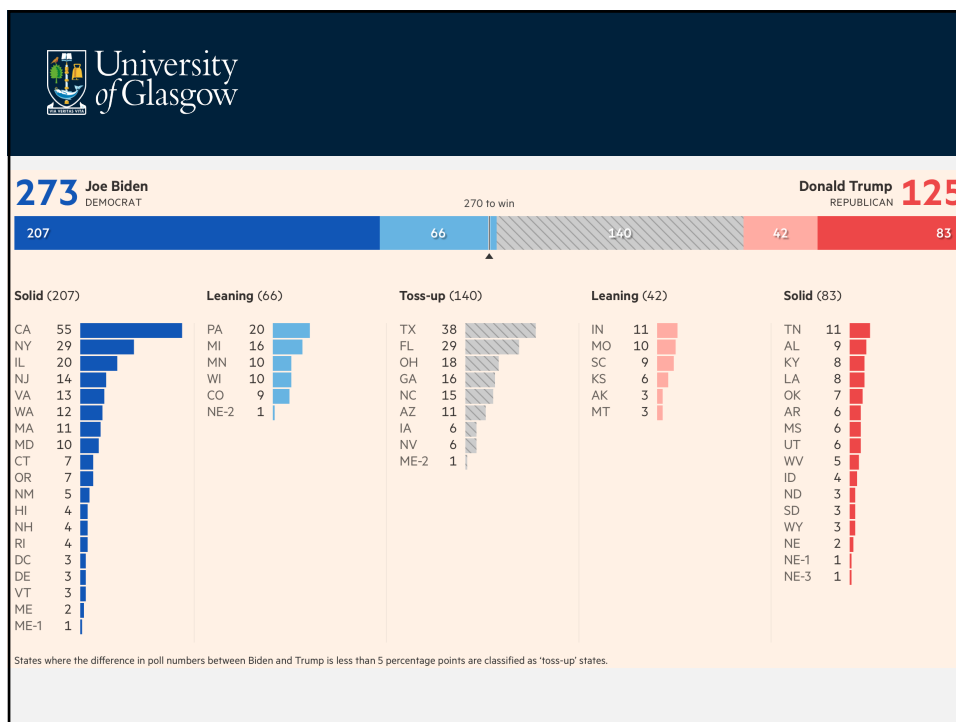
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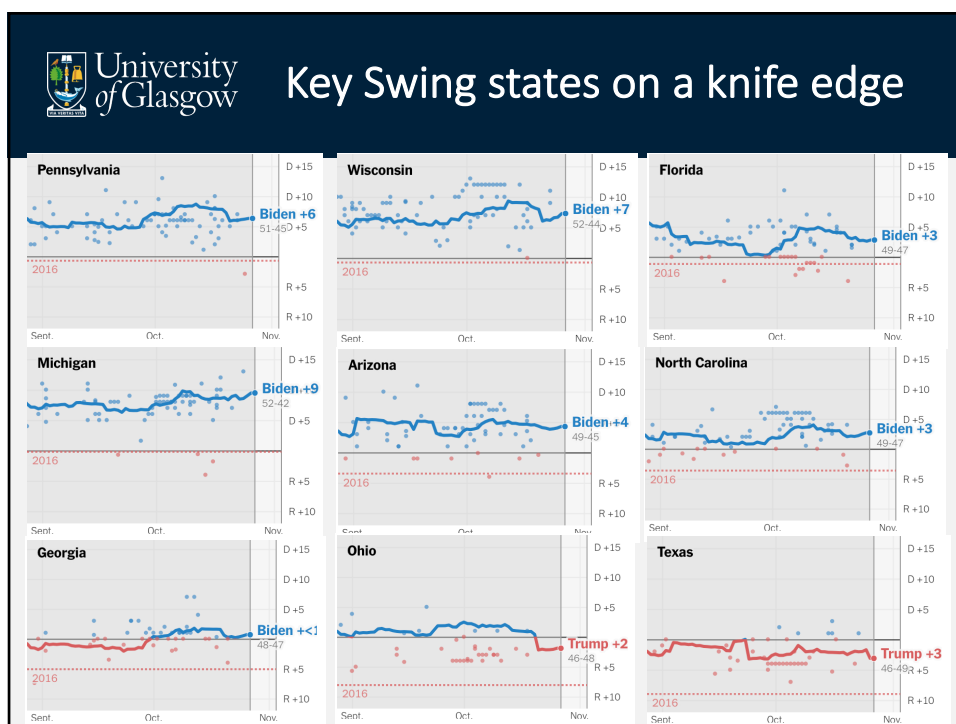
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Nonetheless, this is looking pretty good for Biden, right?

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NPR	290	163	85
US News	290	185	63
ABC News	290	163	85
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With Pandemic, more sources of uncertainty than normal

- ? Mail-in Ballots: *how many will be rejected?* (Mail-in ballots tend to have a much higher rejection rate due to signature and other requirements.)
- ? Volume of mail-in ballots: *will the election authorities have the capacity to count all the ballots?*
- ? Delivery of mail-in ballots: *will they be delivered to election authorities in time?* (postal service capacity)
- ? Turnout: *how long will people be willing to queue to vote* (early voting has seen up to 10-hour queues)? And will voting go on until the wee hours?
- ? Voter intimidation: *in some states, armed 'poll-watchers' may be present – will this cause disruption?*

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What to expect as we're expecting

3 & 4 November:

- ? Voting extended due to malfunctions or voters in line
- ? Premature claims of victory (based on claims of voting fraud, ballot tampering, etc.)
- ? DOJ intervenes in counts (based on claims of voting fraud, ballot tampering, etc.)
- ? Hackers claimed to have changed results
- ? Contradictory Reporting: exit polls far less useful, so networks devising proprietary strategies that may result in conflicting calls

Expect: It is going to be a long night and there will not be a clear result

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Ballots arriving after polls close (and 'naked ballots' are the new hanging chads)

- 6 November: deadline for mail-in ballots to be received in KS, KY, MA, **NC**, **PA** & VA
- 8 November: deadline WV
- 9 November: deadline IA
- 10 November: deadline **MN**, MS, **NV**, NJ & NY
- 13 November: deadline **OH** & MD
- 17 November: deadline IL
- 20 November: deadline CA
- Both campaigns already have 'Legal War Rooms'

Expect: Legal challenges, court battles, *naked ballots* & claims of fraud (and Supreme Court involvement?)

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Weeks (!) Following

- Counting may take a long time (some states (e.g., PA) not allowed to start counting mail-in ballots until after polls close)
- Supreme Court may be asked to step in to end counts (as it did in 2000 Bush v. Gore)
- Trump or Biden refuse to accept result, perhaps leading to civil unrest
- State Officials could refuse to certify result and/or conflict between Legislature and Governor in appointing slates of Electors

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KEY DATES beyond 3 November

14 December: the 538 Electors officially cast ballots – this is technically the day the president and vice president are elected

- Faithless Electors? (Electors who vote for a candidate other than their party's official candidate.)

6 January, 2021: newly elected Congress meets to receive and certify the Electoral College result

20 January, 2021: President-Elect is inaugurated

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The John Curtice Question...

Who do I expect to win, so that John can go to sleep on 3 November at a reasonable hour?

- John, just go ahead and go to sleep b/c it is just going to be a big mess when you wake up.

Expect: Biden to win the overall popular vote

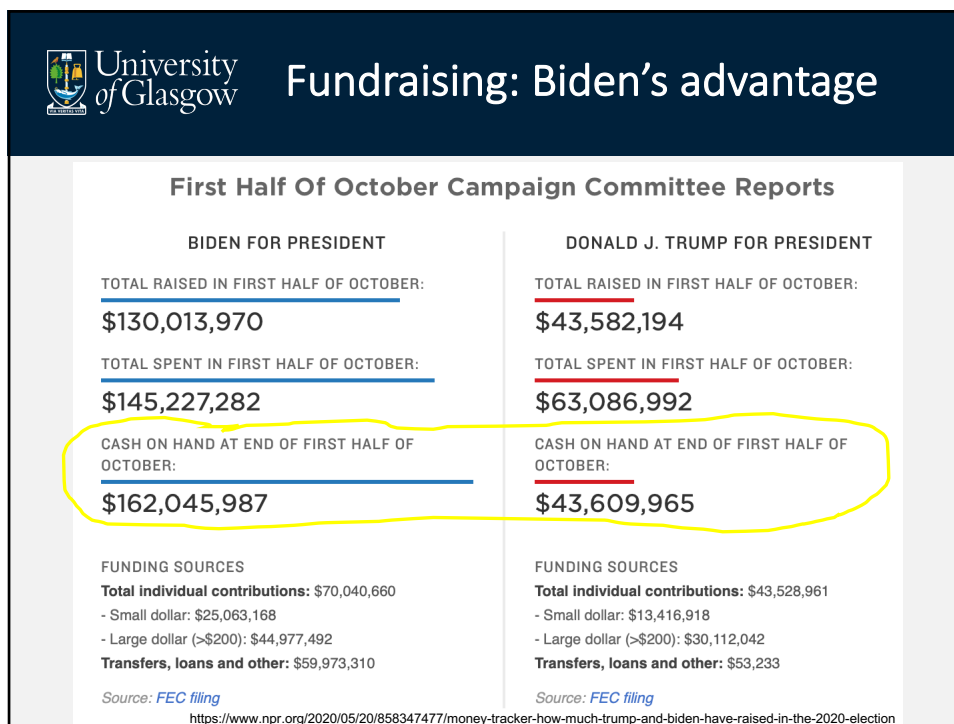
Expect: A long fight for the Electoral College (in that several key swing states are quite close and the rules for mail-in ballots can/will be challenged) - Biden's cash on hand advantage might be helpful.

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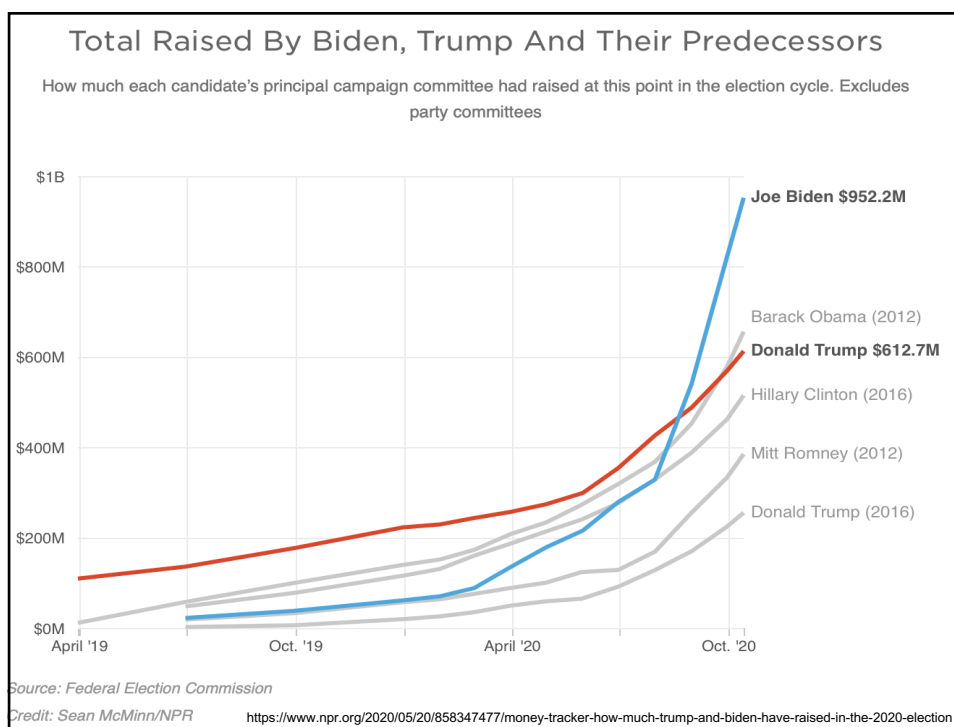


Additional Slides

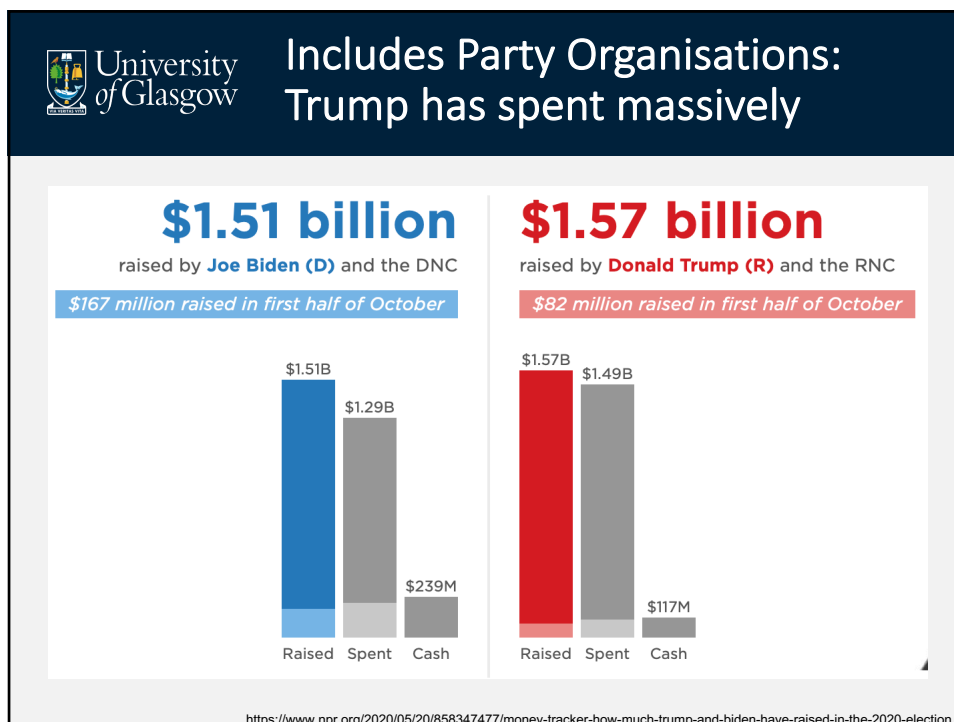
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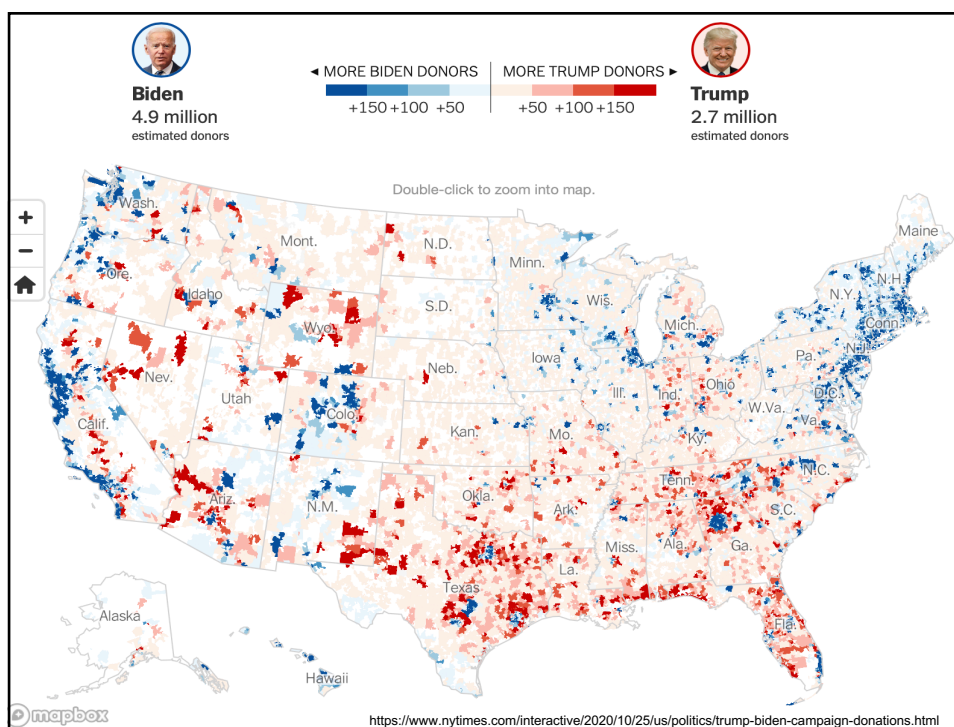
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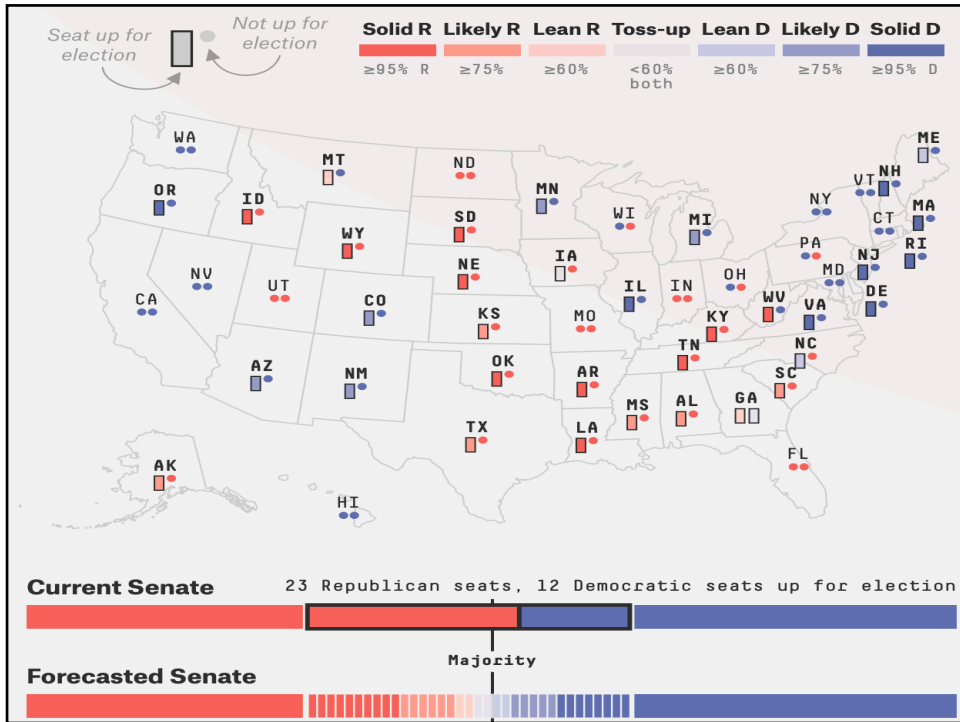
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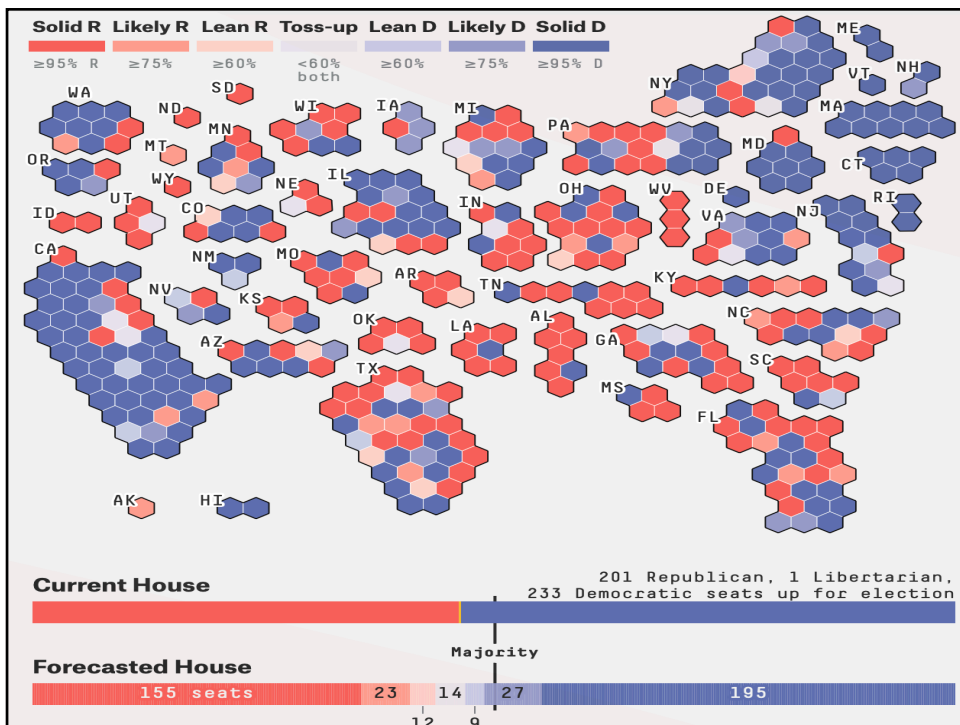
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