

# Primary Primers: Trump is about to lose, and it won't be close.

*Despite close presidential elections in recent years, [Ronald Ranta](#) argues that November will likely see former Vice President Joe Biden beat President Donald Trump by a significant margin. This outcome, he argues, can be predicted by looking at Biden's current significant national lead and polling across key Midwestern states.*

- This article is part of our [Primary Primers](#) series curated by Rob Ledger (Frankfurt Goethe University) and Peter Finn (Kingston University). Ahead of the 2020 election, this series explores key themes, ideas, concepts, procedures and events that shape, affect and define the US presidential primary process. If you are interested in contributing to the series contact Rob Ledger ([ledger@em.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:ledger@em.uni-frankfurt.de)) or Peter Finn ([p.finn@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:p.finn@kingston.ac.uk)).

The Gore-Bush 2000 presidential elections was a very close affair, where the final result was decided by the US Supreme Court and partly down to interpretations of hanging chads in Florida. Ever since, we have become accustomed to closely fought US presidential contests, where the outcomes have been dependent on a number of so called 'swing' states, in particular Florida and Ohio. There are many given reasons for this state of affairs, from the levels of partisanship and gerrymandering to demographics and the electoral system. Given the advantages Democrats enjoy in urban areas and coastal states, and the advantages enjoyed by Republicans in rural areas and smaller states, recent US elections have largely boiled down to the suburban areas of a handful of swing states.

Historically close elections have not been the norm in the US. With a number of exceptions, for example the period after reconstruction in the 1880s and 1890s, the US has witnessed many lopsided elections. In 1972 for example, Republican Richard Nixon beat Democrat George McGovern by over 20 percent, winning 520 electoral votes (out of a possible 538) and in 1984 Ronald Reagan beat Walter Mondale by 18 percent winning every single state bar Minnesota and astonishingly 525 electoral votes.

## Why the polls are a good guide in this election

The polling done over the past few months strongly indicates the possibility of another lopsided election. On the surface this should not come as a surprise. The only presidential election since 2000 that was not close was the 2008 contest between Barack Obama and John McCain. Even though it did not feature a sitting president, it was fought in the midst of a financial crisis that was blamed on the previous two-term Republican administration.

The aggregate of recent polling done by [538](#) and [RealClearPolitics](#) gives Democratic nominee and former Vice President, Joe Biden, an 7.5 percent and 7 percent lead over President Donald Trump respectively. While Biden has enjoyed a small advantage over Trump since affectively clinching the Democratic nomination in late March, the gap has widened and has now stabilised at around 7-8 percent. Just for context, the 2016 Democratic nominee, former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton never enjoyed such a lead; her lead was mostly around 4 percent, with her winning the popular vote by 2 percent. It is not only at the national level that Biden has a strong lead over Trump, state level polling points in the same direction. According to Politico the swing states [are slipping away](#) from Trump. Biden is comfortably ahead in the mid-West states that Trump narrowly won in 2016; Biden is ahead in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin, by 6 percent, 8 percent, and 5 percent respectively. Biden [is also ahead](#) in Florida, Ohio, North Carolina and Arizona, and in a statistical tie in Texas, Iowa and Georgia. Biden might even be competitive in a number of traditional red states, such as Alaska, Montana and South Carolina.

## Why Trump's electoral chances are poor and Biden's are good

This should not come as any great surprise. Trump has been an extremely unpopular President since his inauguration three and a half years ago. Historically, he is the [most unpopular president](#) to run for re-election since polling began on US presidential approval ratings in the 1950s, with [the possible exception](#) of Gerald Ford in 1976. Nevertheless, [many commentators](#) predicted at the beginning of the year that Trump would still win re-election despite this handicap on the heels of a strong economy and an apparent locked in advantage in the Electoral College. What has changed has been Trump's poor handling of the Coronavirus and the resulting financial crisis. As of the time of writing, according to the World Health Organization [COVID-19 dashboard](#), the US has suffered over 4 and a half million confirmed cases and over 150,000 deaths, and the sharpest [second quarter GDP contraction](#) in history.

*[“Tour of McGregor Industries and Build Back Better Plan Press Conference – Dunmore, PA – July 9, 2020”](#) by [Joe Biden](#) is licensed under [CC BY NC SA 2.0](#)*

Some have cast doubt on Biden's chances and on the state of the polls. Trump has even gone as far as [suggesting that Fox news polls](#) that showed him trailing Biden were fake. Others have claimed the polls could be wrong, just as they were in 2016, and that they undercounted 'shy' Republicans. The fact is that the 2016 election was well within the margin of error of most polls, which [were very close](#) to the national result; the main polling failure was in mid-West states. There has also been no evidence to support the [‘shy’ Republican claim](#), if anything the polls might be over counting them. It is important to note that Biden's current lead is also [beyond the margin of error](#). Additionally, [voters who dislike both](#) candidates, a group that broke sharply for Trump in 2016, are now 2 to 1 more likely to vote for Biden.

There are also [many reasons to be sceptical](#) of any October surprise that would tilt the election in Trump's favour, as was the case in 2016. If anything, Trump's poor handling of the pandemic and the financial crisis, his contradictory and conspirational statements, and his exceptional ability to harm his own chances, might suggest such a surprise could happen, but not in his favour. An example of this is the recent report that the New York District Attorney [is investigating Trump](#) and his former company for fraud. Additionally, Trump's recent and [increasing attacks on postal ballots](#), which he claims would lead to election fraud, might cause lower turnout amongst his own supporters. That being said, the [challenge many states face](#) in expanding postal ballots might cause delays to reporting results and increase political uncertainties; these challenges would be less noticeable and consequential in a lopsided Biden win.

## The significance of a big Biden win in November

A lopsided Biden victory would be significant for several additional reasons. A lopsided loss would make it much harder for Trump to contest and or [refuse to accept](#) the election results. It would also make it much harder for the President and the Republican led Senate to try and sneak in nominations and or legislation during the lame-duck session. A lopsided Biden victory would also dramatically reshape US politics during this decade. Beyond winning back the Senate, such a victory would alter the political make up of many US states at a critical juncture; 2021 presents '[a once-in-a-decade opportunity to drive the redistricting process](#)', if the party can also win key state legislative chambers on Biden's coattails. Perhaps the most important result of a strong Biden performance might be the sending of a clear message that the US has moved on from Trump and his divisive politics.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP – American Politics and Policy, nor the London School of Economics.*

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## About the author

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