

# Predicting the 2020 American Presidential Election - A Postmortem

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YouTube Link to Podcast: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiXdn59nZSA&t=3510s>

SoundCloud Link to Podcast:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-918440573/predicting-the-2020-american-presidential-election>

Link to Podcast Script: [Predicting the 2020 American Presidential Election Script - Google Docs](#)

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It was approximately one year ago when I began researching for what would ultimately become my podcast predicting the 2020 American presidential election. The research process took two months, the scripting a month and a half, and recording another month. Looking back on how I felt during those few months, I realize that I worked so hard for entirely selfish reasons: I wanted to prove to myself that I was capable of more than I believed and that I could apply my knowledge to something original.

It was not until several of my friends, family, and teachers positively commented on my podcast that I realized I had created an educational and insightful argument. Hearing these words means more than I can say, knowing that my work helped bring light to those who are too often forgotten in this country and made clear the impact one's voice can have. The podcast currently sits at roughly 350 views - hundreds more than I ever thought possible, and I am deeply grateful that so many have taken an interest.

Now that the election has come and gone, with President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. set to be inaugurated on January 20, 2021, I want to revisit the podcast and reflect on what went wrong and how I plan to address those problems in the future. While I am proud of the methods I used in my research, I did not account for some important data that would have made a significant difference in my electoral college prediction.

I do not think anybody could have predicted the numerous crises 2020 would bring, particularly a raging pandemic that at the time of this writing has killed over 1.8 million people. When I finished researching for the podcast, the coronavirus was hardly in the news, and by the time I was done scripting, it had run rampant across America. I did not foresee COVID-19 causing as major a disruption in life as it did, and I should have accounted for the virus more in the podcast even if it meant releasing it at a later date. However - and this might be my arrogance speaking - I do not believe the pandemic itself would have changed any of my state predictions,

as I firmly believe President Trump's base would have outnumbered any additional democratic support he had to challenge as a consequence of the pandemic. Rather, it was President Trump's actions during the pandemic, especially after my podcast went live, that changed the electorate in ways I did not account for. President Trump undoubtedly lost respect among many voters when he repeatedly claimed that the virus would soon be eliminated even as hundreds of Americans were losing their lives each day, and it was difficult not to notice the President's strain towards wearing masks that presented him as someone incapable of acknowledging the truth, which further distanced himself from any potential swing voters.

Judging by precedent, I believe the biggest thing the President lacked which separated voters from his cause was a sense of empathy for those struggling with the pandemic. I remember watching one of President Trump's press briefings where a reporter asked him a question along the lines of if he could provide some assurance to the American people that they should remain hopeful during such a challenging time, to which the President berated the reporter for his question. The fact of the matter is that Americans look to the president in times of crisis, and whether or not President Trump believed containing the pandemic to be of the utmost importance does not matter when so many citizens' social and financial security is dwindling by the hour; voters simply want to hear the president empathize with them, to the same effect as FDR with his fireside chats. This lack of empathy even extended to mail-in voting, which the president repeatedly and wrongfully declared would lead to immense voter fraud. For millions of Americans, mail-in voting is a convenient (and sometimes only way) to cast a vote, and hearing those actions undermined by the most powerful office in the world likely caused many Americans to feel that the president did not represent them. Holding rallies with thousands of people during the pandemic further solidified President Trump's image as somebody who is not in tune with the electorate, and it was those actions I believe that cost him the presidency.

However, if you told me even the day before the election that President Trump would wind up with 74 million votes, I would have thought he won in a landslide; it was the staggering voter turnout of roughly 160 million Americans that I failed to account for. Although the pandemic and social unrest following the killing of George Floyd undoubtedly led to a higher turnout than expected, I should have looked at data that showed how the racial and ethnic demographics of swing states, in particular, had changed over the past several years as well as statistics displaying overall enthusiasm regarding the election, as those might have indicated higher turnout and changed my predictions for several states.

What makes this election so perplexing, at least to me, is that despite losing the popular vote by roughly four percent, or approximately seven million votes, I still believe President Trump performed well. President Trump managed to increase turnout among his base nationwide, and where he did lose the popular vote he lost so narrowly. His support among

Hispanics, particularly in Miami-Dade County where he managed to narrow the Democratic victory margin in 2016 from roughly 30 points down to seven, was impressive and propelled him to win his home state of Florida by the largest margin since President George W. Bush's victory in 2004. He maintained or expanded his base in solidly Republican midwestern states, and even won the nation's historic bellwether, Ohio, by the same eight-point margin from 2016. Down-ballot candidates heavily benefited from President Trump's popularity, with the House Democratic majority shrinking significantly. Moreover, despite President-elect Joe Biden securing the most votes of any candidate in United States history, Republican success down-ballot proves that this nation remains deeply divided over Trumpism, and that division will likely linger for the next several years. I still consider Joe Biden's victory to be a monumental feat, but I cannot say I am as impressed by it as I am about how President Trump - easily the most divisive President in modern times - reshaped the electorate.

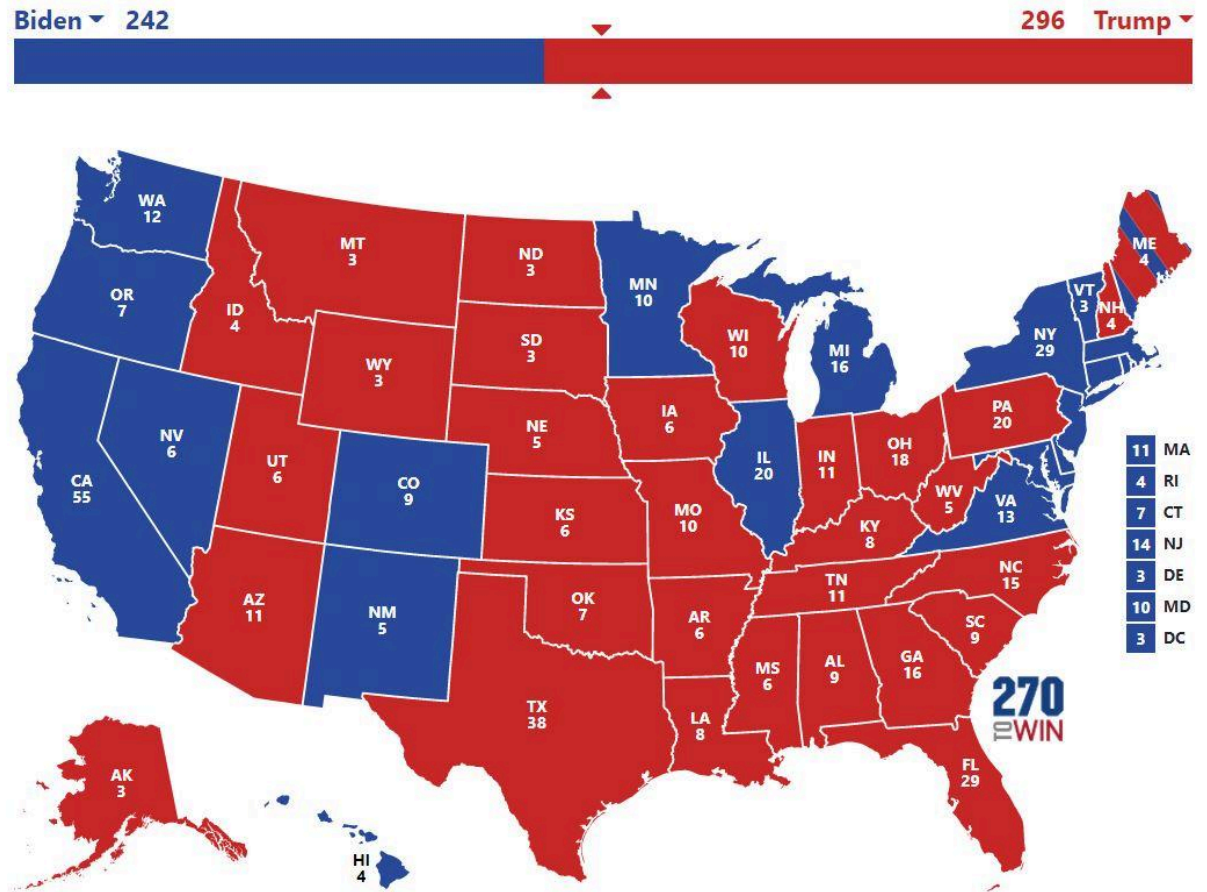
Moreover, I am happy that I did not focus too heavily on polls in my predictions, as it is true that they are a mere snapshot in time and can fail to survey an accurate sample. While I do not think polls should be dismissed entirely, I do believe that in the modern political landscape regarding federal elections it is nearly impossible to get an accurate poll when so many voters change their minds at the last minute or are simply too shy to reveal who they want to elect, so they should be incorporated with a grain of salt when analyzing data.

The single biggest regret of my predictions was how I attributed a high probability of victory to states that were anything but certain to go one way on election day. In doing so, I feel as though I let my skew towards precedent outweigh other factors such as changing demographics, and feel that I failed myself and my viewers in the process. Indeed, these states were extremely close on election night, but that does not excuse the fact that I should have used terms that implied uncertain victory. Going forward, I will avoid using terms that imply certainty in results and try to eliminate any data biases.

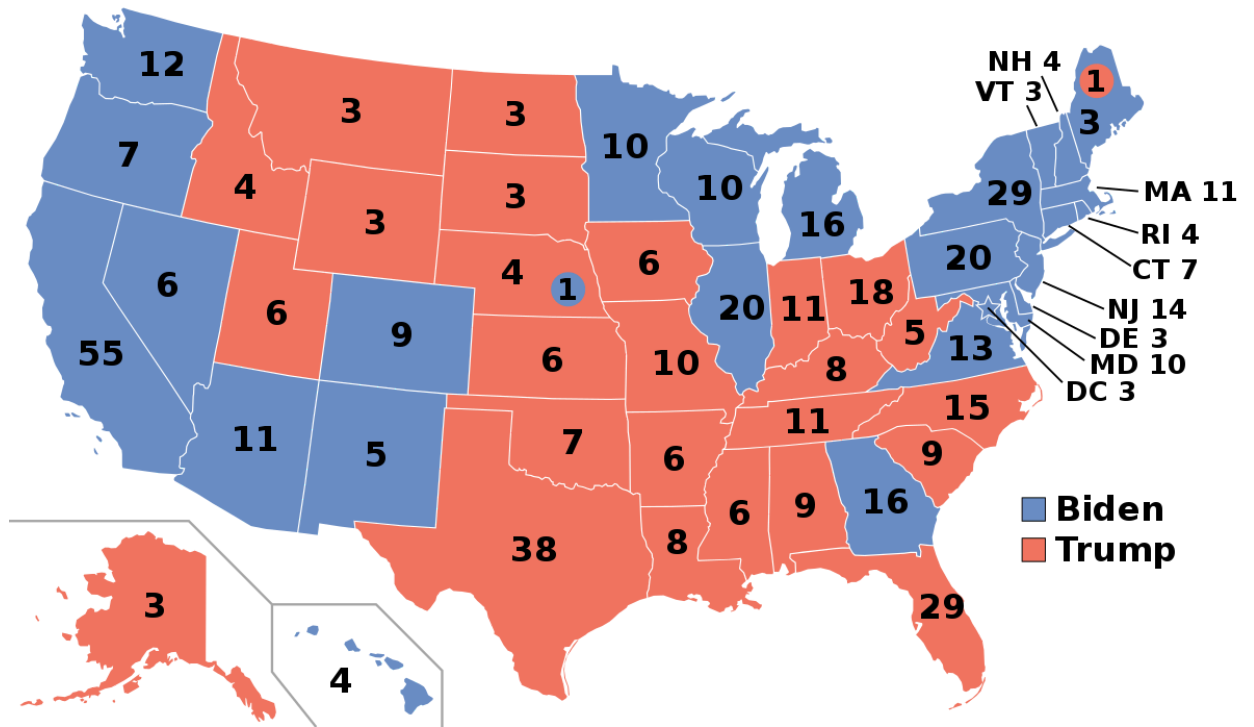
Now, the November 3rd elections are all but a distant memory, and it is time to move forward. The incoming Biden-Harris administration has a lot of struggles ahead of it, but I wish them nothing but success and hope that they can help unify a divided nation. America cannot succeed unless we come together, and to put the days of the pandemic and racial inequality behind us we must unite in search of a common goal.

The fact that so many Americans, including those who had never voted before, decided to make their voices heard in the 2020 election is heartwarming, and I hope we continue to tear down the walls that prevent one-hundred percent turnout in every election, whether it be federal or municipal. There is still a lot of data left to study about the 2020 election, and I cannot wait to examine it all to create a better prediction for 2024. I hope you look forward to it. Until then, stay safe and stay well, and remember: your voice can make a difference.

Michael's 2020 Electoral College Prediction (Image created using 270towin)



Final 2020 Electoral College Map (Image courtesy of Wikipedia)



**Prediction % Correct:  $43.5^*/50$  states = 87% correct**  
Including D.C.:  $44.5/51$  elections  $\approx 87.3\%$

\*Nebraska is considered  $\frac{1}{2}$  correct since I correctly predicted President Trump would win the popular vote, but I was wrong in thinking he would win the second congressional district. Since President Trump lost the popular vote in Maine, I consider my prediction to be wholly incorrect despite that he won the second congressional district.