2020 U.S. ELECTION WEEKLY INSIGHTS AND PREDICTIONS BRIEF

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The Tight U.S. Election Was Predictable
November 16, 2020

Note: This has been inserted into each edition of the "RIWI U.S Election Weekly Insights & Predictions Brief" in order to provide context and a summary of post-election results.

While almost all public polling predicted a landslide victory for President-elect Joe Biden, RIWI's technology showed for weeks in advance that the race would be much tighter, in line with the actual results.

Traditional polls underestimated support for Trump…again

In 2016, mainstream public polls systematically underestimated support for President Trump, and as a result, failed to predict the outcome. In 2020, almost all public polls predicted a landslide victory for Mr. Biden. But once the votes were counted, "Americans had not delivered a blunt repudiation of Trump's values, but had shown themselves to be intractably divided" (*The New Yorker*, November 16, 2020 issue). "[We] over-estimated support for Joe Biden", *The Economist* wrote. Instead of a landslide, Mr. Biden beat Mr. Trump by less than two percentage points in the states that decided the election. Public polling aggregator FiveThirtyEight and *The Economist*'s U.S. elections forecasting project under-estimated support for Trump in every battleground state, and by at least five percent in Florida, Ohio, Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin. In Wisconsin, polls said Mr. Biden was ahead by ten percentage points, and he won by less than one, a huge polling miss.

According to The New York Times, "pollsters spent much of the last four years trying to fix the central problem of 2016 — the underestimation of the Republican vote in multiple states — and they failed."

Clients asked RIWI to provide an alternative lens for 2020

In the months leading up to the election, several global finance firms hired RIWI to provide an alternative, evidence-based lens for their election-related investment decisions. They were skeptical about the reliability of public polls after 2016 and wanted to confirm or challenge their investment theses.

RIWI collected data across the entire country, but the main challenge and area of client interest was to identify whether there was a risk that the polls were missing something in the contested races. As the polls began to show comfortable leads for Mr. Biden in these states, RIWI was asked to look for evidence to confirm, nuance, or reject what the polls were seeing.

RIWI engaged those who don't typically answer polls

Each day over the seven weeks leading up to the election, RIWI technology reached a broad-based, diverse, unique, and random sample of Americans. Respondents included those who don't typically answer or even get asked to answer election polls. Two-thirds of RIWI's U.S. respondents reported they had not answered an election poll in the past year — with over half saying they had *never* answered one. Engaging a truly random sample each day could allow RIWI to identify new coalitions that would not necessarily show up using conventional methods.[1] In total, RIWI randomly engaged 100,584 Americans, half of those in the final week before the election.

[1] Conventional polls draw on a pre-identified sample or voter database, which does not represent a truly random sample of the population. As a result, these approaches risk failing to identify new or changing coalitions of support (a key factor in the 2016 polling miss). Pollsters tried to correct for the 2016 error by overweighting non-College educated white males, but it appears that Mr. Trump may have expanded his voter turnout in new demographic groups, and the polls missed this.

To increase the likelihood of truthful responses, RIWI asked respondents to forecast the outcome in their state, in addition to their preferred candidate and voting likelihood. To further increase the chance of truthfulness and reduce the chance of any "shy" Trump or "shy" Biden voter effects, RIWI did not collect any personally identifiable information from respondents, unlike mainstream polls.

RIWI forecasters anticipated a much tighter race for weeks in advance of the election

While polls showed a consistently strong Biden lead, data from RIWI forecasters showed a tighter race than the conventional poll-of-polls data throughout the pre-election period, both overall and in many of the contested states. As RIWI wrote in its September 25th election report, "there is a broad-based perception among knowledgeable [RIWI] forecasters of an 'undetected' GOP vote."

RIWI's data identified and showed consistently tight races in Michigan, Wisconsin, Nevada, and Pennsylvania, all of which Mr. Biden won by less than two percentage points (polls had expected a much more comfortable margin). In Florida and North Carolina, RIWI forecasters found enough undetected support for Mr. Trump to correctly anticipate him winning those states (polls had expected Mr. Biden would win these states).[2] Each day, RIWI checked these findings by surveying a new randomly engaged group of forecasters in those states, and the results held firm. RIWI forecasters overestimated support for Mr. Trump in Arizona and Georgia which ultimately went to Mr. Biden in exceptionally tight races (the final margin of victory in both states was 0.3 percent).

RIWI data consistently cast doubt on the conventional polling wisdom

The consensus polling wisdom was that Biden would win comfortably in the contested states critical to the election. RIWI relied on a truly random sample of Americans — including the perspectives of those who do not respond to traditional polling methods — rather than trying to sample, or over-sample, various demographic groups based on past voting patterns. Each day in the seven weeks before the election, RIWI tested the prevailing wisdom by canvassing the views of a unique, randomly engaged cohort, and each day these random cohorts cast doubt on the consensus. This approach provided a check on public polling results, and showed clients that a "Blue Wave" was not a forgone conclusion. Clients who knew this in advance were able to leverage this knowledge for increased confidence in their investment decisions.

About RIWI

RIWI stands for "Real-time Interactive World-wide Intelligence." At RIWI, "Every Voice Counts." We provide access to continuous consumer and citizen sentiment in all countries. We break through the noise to find the truth about what people really think, want and observe — by reaching the most diverse audiences, including the disengaged and quiet voices who do not typically answer surveys or express their views on social media. RIWI technology rapidly collects data in every country around the world and displays the results in a secure interactive dashboard in real-time. We only collect anonymous information and from 229 countries and territories, over 80 languages and 1.6 billion interviewees and counting. For more information, please visit www.riwi.com.

For RIWI's 2016 election prediction of a win for President Trump, click here, and for other past elections work, click here. For more information or business inquiries please contact neilweitzman@riwi.com.

[2] The same was true for the North Carolina Senate race: while no public polls correctly called the North Carolina Senate race Republican, RIWI forecasters continued to point to enough undetected support for Republican Senator Thom Tillis to win. Both RIWI and the poll aggregators anticipated the results of the other Senate races, except for the race in Maine.

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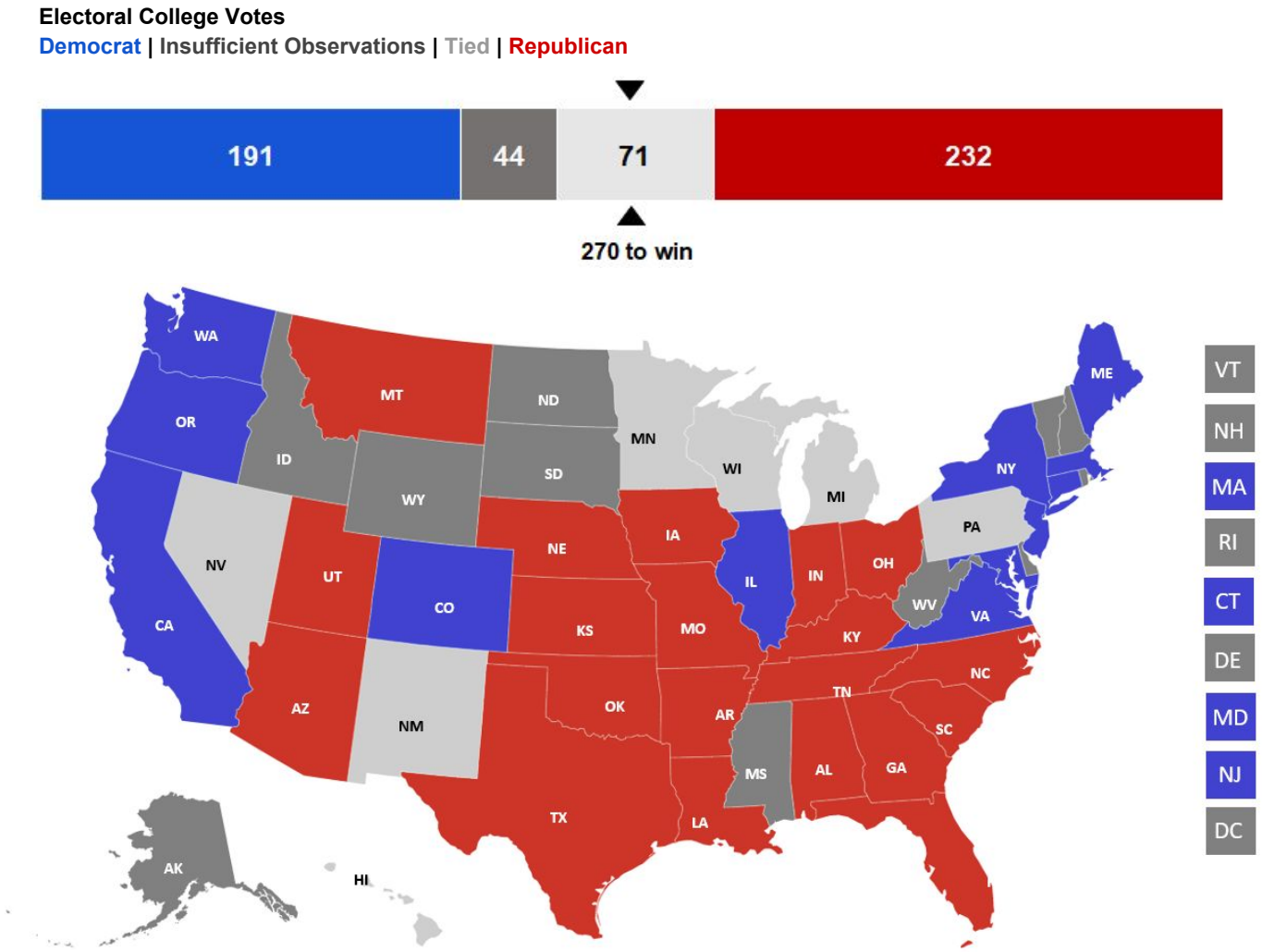
President Trump is expanding his electoral vote lead vs. Mr. Biden;
Republican Senators inch ahead in Key Senate races

Electoral College: As of 12:00 p.m. EDT on October 30, President Trump is leading. RIWI data currently show President Trump has 232 electoral votes in his column vs. former Vice President Biden's 191 (Map 1).
Senate: Of the eight highly contested Senate seats currently under examination, RIWI forecasters predict a Democratic win in Colorado and Maine, and a Republican candidate victory in Georgia, Iowa, Montana, and North Carolina. Arizona and Minnesota are statistically tied (Chart 1).

We mainly profile data in this report from just those who are / were likely to vote when answering RIWI questions. The candidates are statistically tied for 71 electoral votes (Map 1) based on this subset of our data. For the remaining 44 electoral votes, we require additional statistical confidence. Forecasters continue to provide further state-by-state predictions so that we may fully populate the map on November 2.

Map 1: Regardless of whom you support, who do you think will win your state in the 2020 Presidential Election?
Profiling 'Likely voter' data only



Source: RIWI, U.S. Election Predictive Data Stream. September 8-October 30. Includes only *Likely voters* ("Very likely" and "Somewhat likely") and excludes forecasters who *Don't know enough* to express a clear opinion. n = 18,760 forecasters. Of this sample, 4,966 forecasters were collected from October 26-30. Respondents are unique, anonymous and unincentivized.

Note: Map 1 assigns a state-level prediction based on a 95% Confidence Interval. States with fewer than 100 *Likely voters* as of October 30, 2020, have an insufficient number of observations. While there is a unique structure of the Electoral College votes in Maine and Nebraska, we assume under this model that the winner takes all the electoral votes in both states as a simplification. There is historically only one toss-up vote in these two states, and, traditionally, the overall winning candidates in each of the two states are from opposite parties, resulting in a reasonable likelihood that the toss-up votes balance each other out. While it is possible that the same candidate may win both toss-up votes, we chose not (for the purposes of question-design consistency at the state-level) to formulate our data collection method by congressional district. On October 29, we conducted a statistical analysis of congressional districts, disaggregating our state-level response data by all sub-counties in Maine, which validates our approach.

When widening our subset of data to include randomly engaged RIWI forecasters who report that it is "worth their time to vote", **the President currently maintains a 67 Electoral College vote lead over Mr. Biden – 262 electoral votes are secure at this time for Mr. Trump; 195 are secure for Mr. Biden**. This is a larger cohort of RIWI forecasters whose opinions tend to be collinear with the 'likely voter' cohort highlighted above.

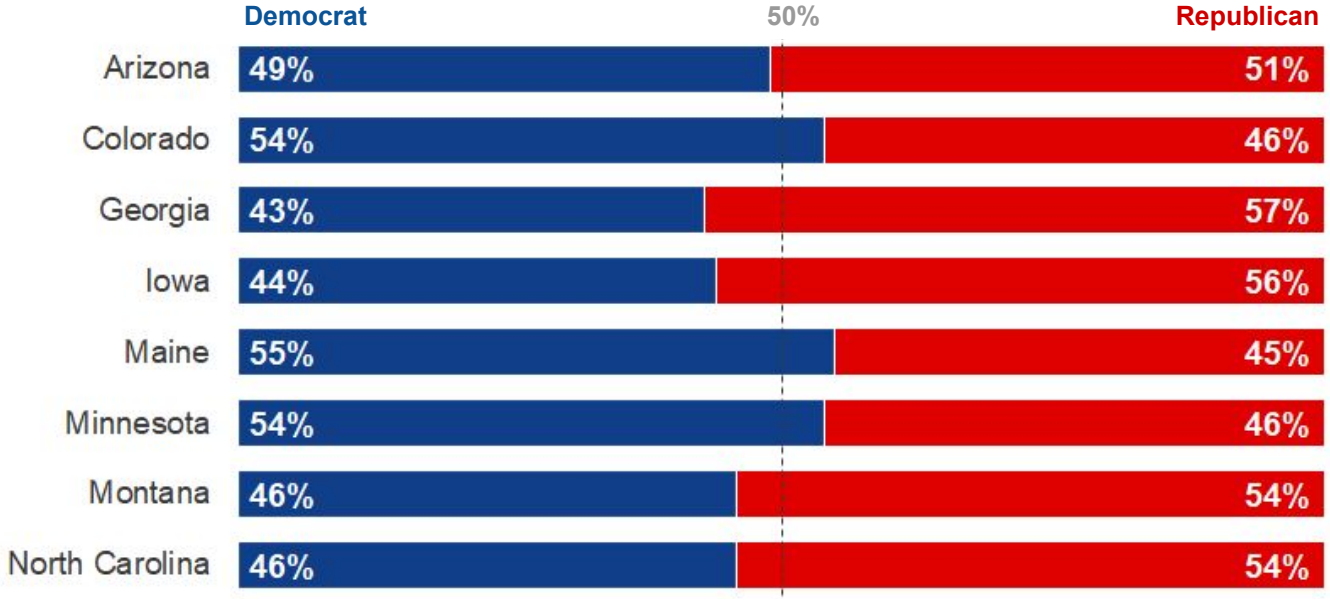
Watching Eight Close Senate Races: Two Democrat, Four Republican, Two Ties

Of the eight highly contested Senate seats currently under RIWI's examination, RIWI forecasters (among those who are / were 'likely' to vote at the time of being asked) predict a Democratic win in two states, and a Republican candidate victory in four. Two states are statistically tied (Chart 1). Since October 26, RIWI has accelerated forecasting to make our data more precise on November 2. As boosted numbers come in, subscribers can follow each Senate race in the links below.

- RIWI forecasters predict Governor John Hickenlooper (D) of Colorado and Speaker Sara Gideon (D) of Maine to win their states.
- RIWI forecasters predict Senator David Perdue (R) of Georgia, Senator Joni Ernst (R) of Iowa, and Senator Thom Tillis (R) of North Carolina, and Senator Steve Daines (R) of Montana to win their states.
- Candidates in Arizona and Minnesota are statistically tied.

Chart 1: Regardless of whom you support, which candidate do you think will win the Senate election in your state?

Profiling 'Likely voter' data only



Source: RIWI, U.S. Election Predictive Data Stream. October 1-30. Includes only *Likely voters* ("Very likely" and "Somewhat likely") and excludes forecasters who *Don't know enough* to express a clear opinion. n = 3,232 forecasters (Arizona 558, Colorado 405, Georgia 596, Iowa 323, Maine 333, Minnesota 174, Montana 226, North Carolina 617). Respondents are unique, anonymous, and unincentivized.