

Politics, Pandemic, and the Divided States: Stress over COVID-19 a major driver of landmark US vote

Shades of 2016 colour voter dynamics ahead of 2020 vote

October 30, 2020 – It was polarization and division that presaged the Trump presidential era. As the Republican candidate attempts to double the length of his stay in the White House, it is once again polarization and division – some of it new, some of it unforeseen – that drives American voters to the final day of voting on November 3.

The last presidential election may have felt like a lifetime ago. But four years later, familiar voting dynamics are at play, along with new ones. In 2020, stress levels over the COVID-19 pandemic are a significant factor in how Americans intend to vote – or already have cast their ballots.

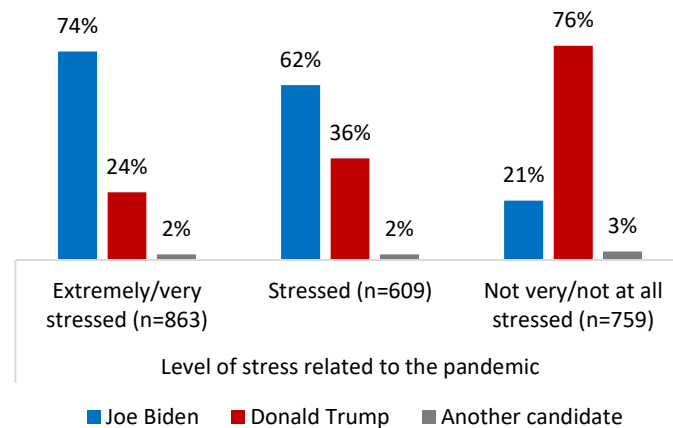
So too is the enthusiasm – or lack thereof – for the two presidential candidates. Trump voters are motivated by a fervent support for their candidate. Joe Biden supporters – by contrast – are divided between excitement for the Democratic nominee and a more basic desire to keep Trump from a second term. Similar vote dynamics among Democrats were at play four years ago when Trump and then-presidential nominee Hillary Clinton battled for the White House.

Heading into the final days of the 2020 campaign, however, it is Biden who holds an eight-point edge in popular vote over the incumbent (53% versus 45% respectively). While Trump battles in swing states for voters more likely to cast a ballot for him on election day, Biden has an advantage among those who have already voted. That said, the ghosts of elections past may be hanging around a little longer than Halloween this year, as uncertainty over mail in ballots, voter suppression, and a possible court-decided outcome may haunt voters in the U.S. and observers around the world.

More Key Findings:

- Four-in-five Trump voters (79%) say they are voting for their candidate because they like what he stands for, while one-in-five (21%) are more motivated to block Joe Biden. For Biden voters, the motivation is much more evenly divided, with 55 per cent enthusiastic about him and 45 per cent wanting to stop Trump

Vote intention in the U.S. by level of stress related to the pandemic
(Leaning, decided, and advance voters, n=2,231)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from October 23 – 28, 2020 among a representative randomized sample of 2,231 American leaning, decided, and advance voters who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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- Three-quarters of those who are very or extremely worried about COVID-19 are voting for Joe Biden. Conversely, among those who are not at all worried about the virus, Trump holds a 76 per cent to 21 per cent advantage.
- The President leads by 12 points among White voters (55% to 43%). Among Black voters however, he garners just 12 per cent, compared to 86 per cent for Joe Biden. The former VP also garners at least 60 per cent of votes among Latinos and other visible minorities
- Men are divided evenly between the two candidates, with 48 per cent supporting Biden and 50 per cent supporting Trump. Women, however, offer Biden a 17-point advantage (58% to 41%).

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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Part One: Voter motivations

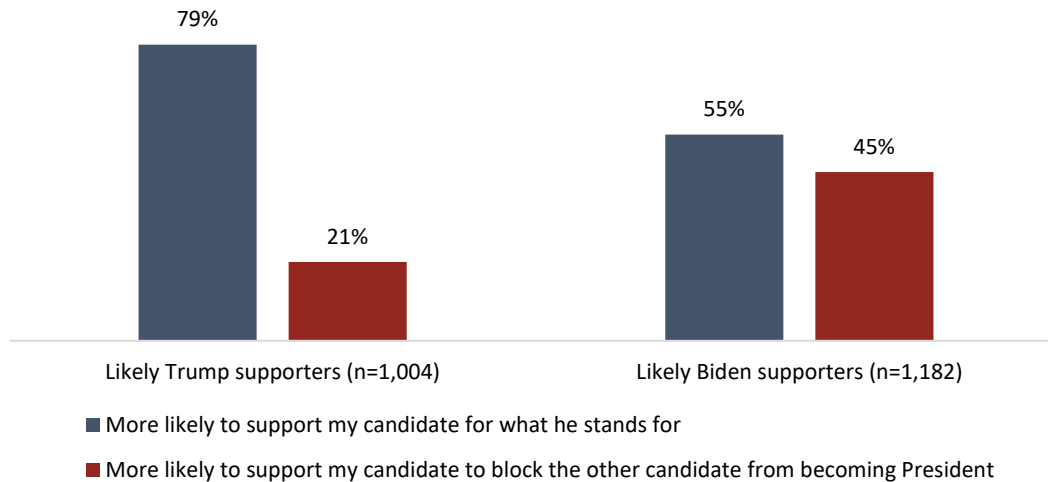
In a race unlike anything seen before in the United States, the story unfolding is one of an [establishment candidate](#) seeking a [return to normalcy](#) battling another who is one of the [most polarizing](#) in the nation's history.

Americans were asked why it is they support their preferred candidate. President Donald Trump's supporters are much more motivated by admiration for their candidate, while former Vice President Joe Biden's voters are close to evenly split between supporting the man himself, and blocking Trump:

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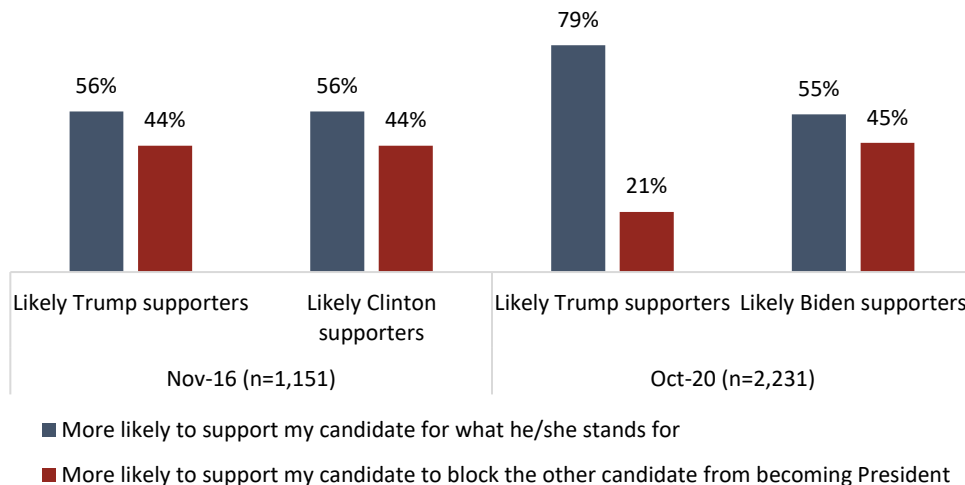
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All things considered, would you say you are:



The notable irony in the Democratic Party’s chosen candidate, who was deemed to be a unifying presence in the face of partisan tension across the country, is that Biden supporters’ motivations mirror near-exactly those of Hillary Clinton’s supporters four years ago. The change for Trump is that while his voters wanted to block Clinton in 2016, they largely want to boost him this time around:

**Motivation for vote
ARI Polling November 2016 compared to October 2020**

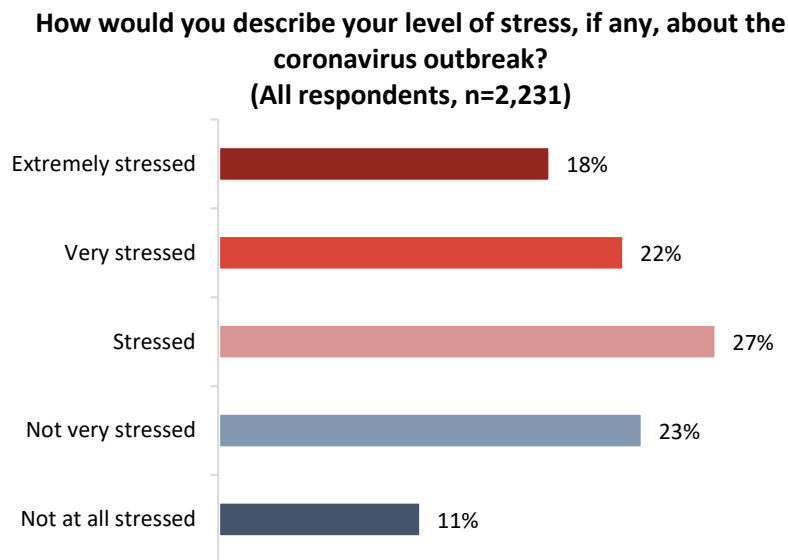


Part Two: Pandemic Factor

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The 2020 election is taking place against the backdrop of a global pandemic. With a death toll of more than 228,000 Americans thus far, questions about how the coronavirus outbreak has been and should be handled continue to play a [large role](#) in this presidential contest.

More than [nine months after](#) the first recorded case in the US, most people in the country are still feeling stressed about coronavirus, while a significant segment – one-in-three (34%) – saying it does not feel stressed.



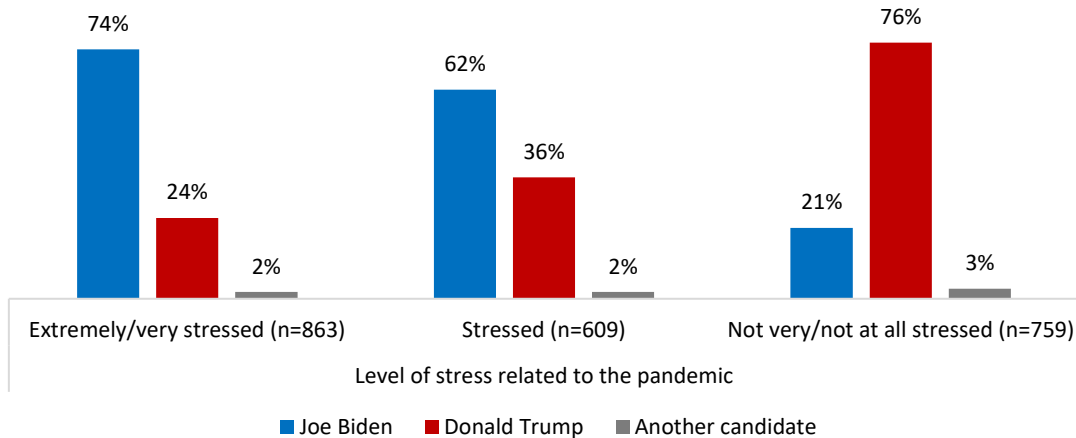
Donald Trump and Joe Biden have been communicating quite differently about the pandemic, with the White House adding [“ending the COVID-19 pandemic”](#) to its list of achievements (a spokeswoman has since said this was “poorly worded”), while Biden has warned that the nation must brace for a [“dark winter”](#). The Republican incumbent has [voiced frustration](#) at the amount of coverage this issue is getting, while the Democratic challenger is making his opponents [“almost criminal”](#) handling of the pandemic the main line of attack in his campaign.

In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that anxiety about the pandemic relates strongly to voter preference. Three-quarters (74%) of those are very or extremely stressed about coronavirus supporting Biden, and a similar proportion (76%) of those who are not very or not at all stressed supporting Trump.

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**Vote intention in the U.S. by level of stress related to the pandemic
(Leaning, decided, and advanced voters, n=2,231)**



Part Three: Vote Dynamics

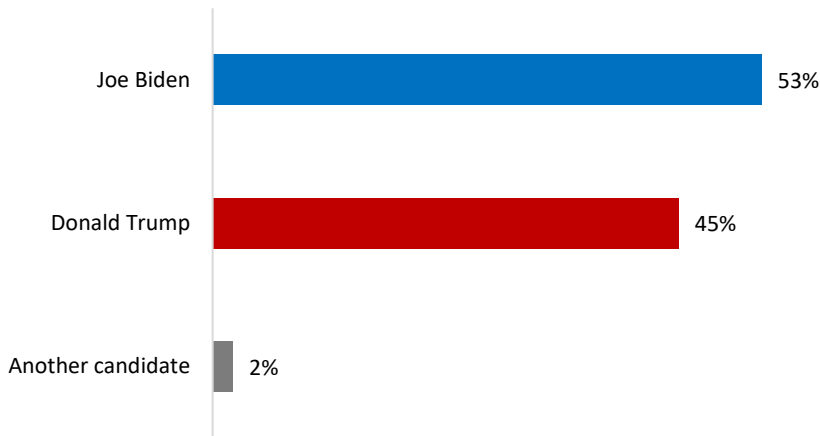
Voters for each candidate are using vastly different strategies in how they cast their ballot. Advanced voting and mail-in ballots are being utilized at levels never seen before. More than [66 million voters](#) have already voted, 19 million more than who voted early in the 2016 election overall.

Four-in-five Biden voters say they will vote early voting or already have, compared to just 46 per cent of Trump voters. Half (49%) of the President’s supporters say they will wait for election day, while just 19 per cent of his opponent’s voters will do so:

How voters will cast their ballot:		
	Trump Voters	Biden Voters
Will vote early or have already voted	46%	78%
Will vote on election day	49%	19%
Haven’t decided yet	5%	3%

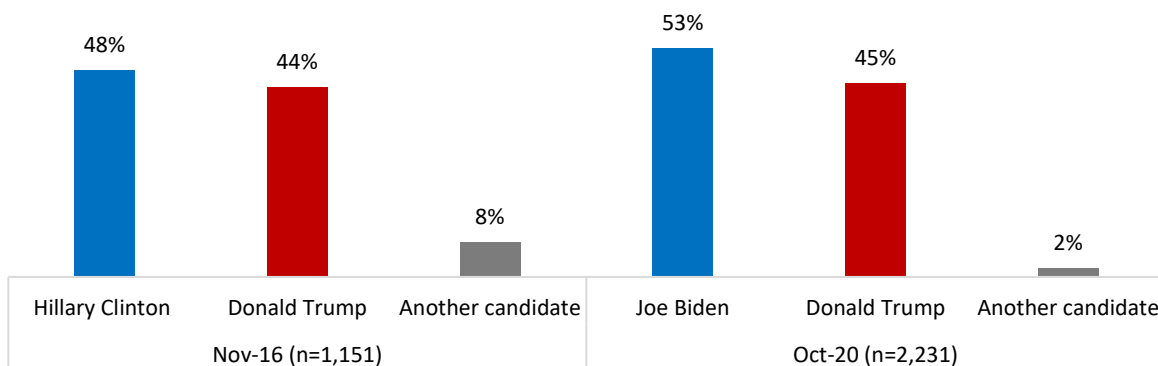
With mere days left in the election period, Joe Biden leads Donald Trump by eight percentage points among leaning, decided, and advance voters. This, as 90 per cent of those still to vote say they are “absolutely certain” about their decision on they will support – a finding consistent across age, gender, ethnicity, and other demographics ([see detailed tables](#)).

**Vote intention in the U.S.
(Leaning, decided, and advanced voters, n=2,231)**



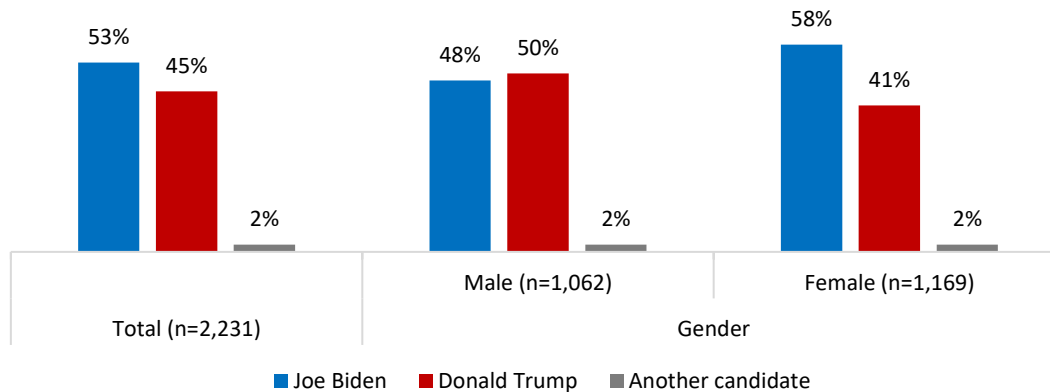
Biden’s eight-point margin does not necessarily spell a path to certain victory. Consider Angus Reid Institute polling in the final days of the last U.S. Presidential Election in [November 2016](#). Ultimately, this data was statistically consistent with the final result, with Clinton winning [48 per cent of the popular vote](#), compared to Trump’s 46 per cent. Despite garnering nearly 2.9 million more votes, however, Clinton still lost the election. Much of the result will depend on key individual swing states which will decide who gets to 270 electoral college votes:

**Vote intention in the U.S. among leaning, decided, and advanced voters
ARI polling November 2016 compared to October 2020**



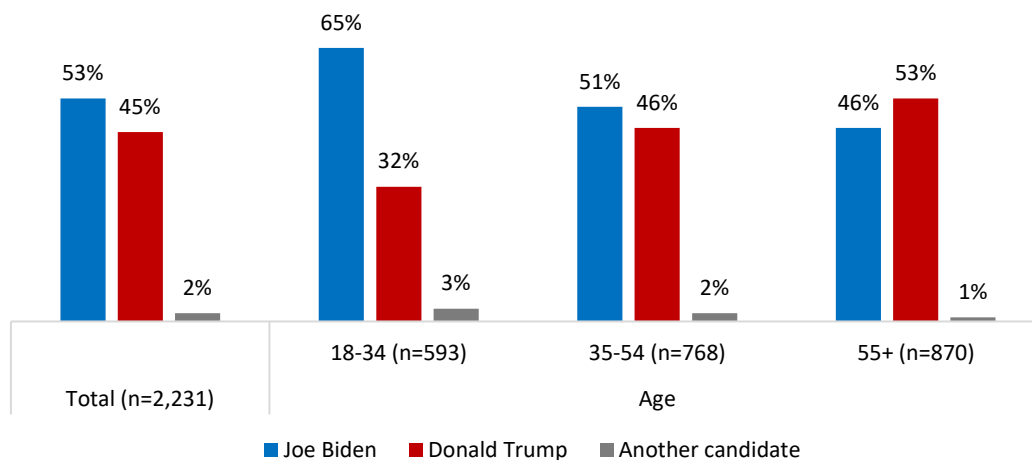
Vote intention among men is statistically identical, with Trump holding a two-point advantage. Women, however, have a much clearer preference, choosing Joe Biden by 17-point margin:

**Vote intention in the U.S. by gender
(Leaning, decided, and advanced voters)**



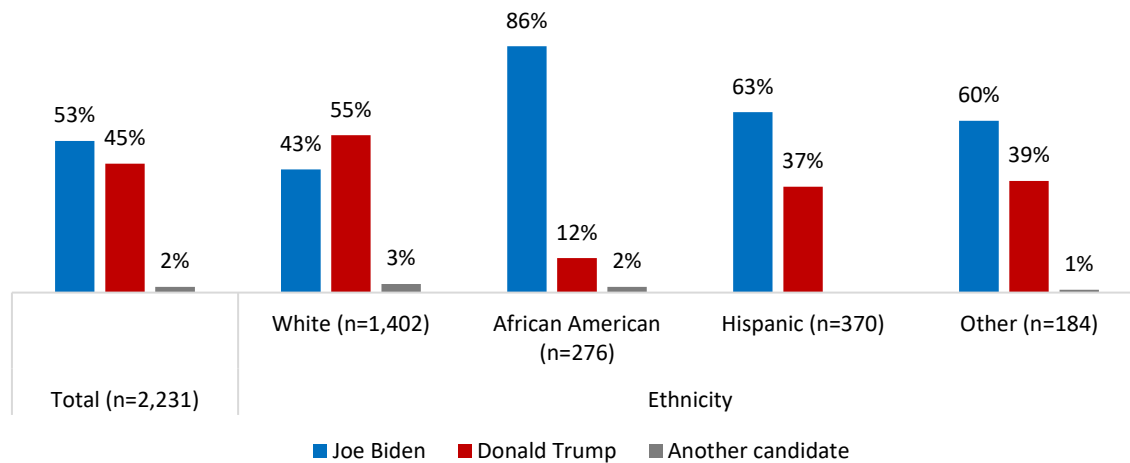
Turnout among younger voters will tell much of the story of this election. Americans over the age of 54, those traditionally most likely to vote, give Trump a seven-point advantage. Biden, however, holds a five-point lead among 35- to 54-year-olds, and a massive two-to-one advantage among 18- to 34-year-olds:

**Vote intention in the U.S. by age
(Leaning, decided, and advanced voters)**



President Trump’s strength continues to be among White voters, where he holds 12-point advantage over Biden (55% to 43%). The rest of the country, however, leans toward the challenger. For Black Americans, support for the former Vice President is near unanimous, while he garners at least 60 per cent of votes among Latinos and other visible minorities:

**Vote intention in the U.S. by ethnicity
(Leaning, decided, and advanced voters)**



For detailed results by age, gender, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by voter registration, vote intention, and political alignment, [click here](#).

For detailed results by stress about pandemic-related stress, [click here](#).

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