

# The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

## Former Vice President Biden and Senator Harris are Declared President-Elect and Vice President-Elect

On Saturday, Democratic nominee Joe Biden was named President-elect of the United States after securing 270 electoral college votes in the 2020 presidential election. Biden, the former vice president, and his running mate, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, are slated to take office on January 20th, 2021. Biden was victorious in his campaign for the White House on the third attempt, having previously ran for president in 1988 and 2008. His last stint in public office was as President Barack Obama's vice president from 2008-2016, and served before that as a U.S. Senator from Delaware. Biden officially surpassed the 270 electoral college votes needed on Saturday following several days of continuing vote tabulations when he was projected to be the winner in the critical battleground state of Pennsylvania. Analysts had anticipated that an outcome in the presidential race may not be known on Election Day itself, considering the large number of mail-in ballots this year because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Overall, the 2020 election had the highest voter turnout in over a century, with both candidates netting over 70 million votes. So far, President-elect Biden has secured over 75,600,000, with President Trump winning over 71,200,000. In the all-important electoral college, Biden successfully rebuilt the "blue wall," a coalition of swing states including Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, that have previously been key to catapulting Democratic candidates to the White House. Biden was also able to compete in battleground states that President Trump won in 2016, such as Arizona and Georgia, and the former vice president currently maintains leads in both of those states as well. For his part, President Trump won both Florida and Ohio, two states that his campaign had identified as being key to potentially winning re-election.

Despite President-elect Biden reaching the milestone of 270 electoral college votes, President Trump has indicated he won't concede defeat without a legal fight. The president has baselessly claimed that voter fraud is rampant in mail-in and absentee ballots, and has vowed to challenge the outcome of the race in several states, including Georgia, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Nevada. These legal challenges will play no role in altering the outcome of the race, although it is within the president's right to request an investigation. Legal challenges and recounts over vote counts are not unheard of, however, President-elect Biden's advantage in the contested states is in the tens of thousands and historically – even at best – recounts only affect the margin by a few hundred votes, if any.

On Election Day itself, President Trump got out to a promising lead over Joe Biden. Important battleground states such as Florida, Ohio, North Carolina, and Texas all showed strong advantages for the incumbent. This contributed to a "red mirage" in which the ballots cast in person on election day skewed heavily Republican, which in turn showed the president with a commanding advantage before mail-in and absentee ballots were counted. The early returns also showed a strong Republican turnout, although this was offset by the disproportionate number of Democrats who cast absentee ballots or voted by mail.

In Florida particularly, President Trump could not afford to lose the state and its 29 electoral votes. Trump won Florida in 2016 and it provided his campaign with momentum through the rest of the night on his way to winning the White House. This year, the president performed even better in the state as a result of increased support among minorities. Latinos and African-Americans had strongly backed Hillary Clinton in 2016, and while Joe Biden still did well among these communities, the president's numbers strengthened significantly. In the all-important county of Miami-Dade, President Trump picked up over 200,000 more votes this year than in 2016. This was an extremely positive development for the president, and his campaign harbored hopes this would indicate a larger trend of President Trump improving his standing among minorities across the country.

Ohio was another state that President Trump secured on Election Day, and one that he couldn't afford to lose. Similar to Florida, Trump carried Ohio in 2016, and based on polling, he needed to once again win the state in order to have a chance at winning a second term. In the end, the president ended up winning Ohio by about a 470,000-vote margin, which was similar to his margin of victory in 2016. Experts on elections in Ohio have indicated that the president's surprisingly comfortable victories in both 2016 and 2020 show a demographic shifting right-ward and providing evidence of Ohio becoming less of a battleground state. Ohio's urban areas of Columbus, Cincinnati, and Cleveland all predictably went for Joe Biden, but the growth of Ohio's working class and rural population propelled the president to a comfortable victory in the state.

Adding to the trend of states who tilted the election in President Trump's favor early was North Carolina. Joe Biden had harbored hopes of winning the state, and indeed got out to an early advantage. However, as more votes were counted, the president took the lead and it became increasingly more pronounced as the night progressed. Republicans have carried North Carolina in nine of the last ten elections, with the exception coming in 2008, when President Obama won the state. In 2016, President Trump won 51% of the vote, and despite his margin of victory shrinking marginally this year, the president did enough to win the state.

Prior to the election, Democrats had grown increasingly hopeful of flipping Texas, in what would have been a major coup. Part of the Democrats' strategy was pinned on increasing voter turnout, and running up the margins of victory in solidly Democratic urban areas. The first part of this strategy was successful, as Texas counted roughly two million more votes this year than in 2020. However, the new voters were roughly split between President Trump and President-elect Biden, with both candidates securing over five million votes. Despite the uptick in



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turnout, President Trump won the exact same percentage of the vote in the last two elections, with 52.2%. Interestingly, Trump's path to victory in Texas was similar to that of Florida. Increased Latino support for the president surprised Democrats, particularly the increase in Republican votes cast by Mexican-Americans in rural counties across Texas. Moving forward, Democrats are warning of the danger of adopting a "one-size fits all" policy toward Latino voters, as it is an extremely diverse group comprising of several different ethnic backgrounds, all of which prioritize different issues.

In the lead up to Election Day, political analysts had warned Americans to expect what they called "red and blue mirages" when the first presidential race results started to come in. These referred to situations in which early on, certain states would incorrectly appear to be highly in favor of one candidate over the other ("red mirages" for Trump and "blue mirages" for Biden). These phenomena came about because of the fact that states varied in the type of ballots that they would tabulate first once the polls closed on election night. Since as a generality, Democrats were more likely to vote early or by mail and Republicans more likely to vote on Election Day, these "red and blue mirages" would appear based on which kind of votes were counted first in a respective state. So, in Ohio for example, where early ballots were tallied before those that were cast on Election Day, a "blue mirage" took shape which showed former Vice President Biden with a substantial lead over President Trump in the hours directly following the closing of polls on election night. However, once election officials finished tabulating these votes and then moved to counting those cast on Election Day, Trump began to quickly make up ground on Biden, eventually surpassing him in the overall statewide vote totals and winning the state by a sizable margin of around 8 percentage points, 53.4%-45.2%.

The flip side of this "blue mirage" in Ohio happened in other key battleground states like Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, where "red mirages" showed Trump with significant leads which slowly began to evaporate over time. In these states, officials had decided not to begin processing early votes and mail-in votes until around Election Day, meaning that the results from these types of ballots would not take shape until after those that were cast on the day itself. In Wisconsin, the first returns on election night and into the late hours of the evening showed Trump with a healthy advantage on the former vice president, but the order of tabulating votes in addition to the increased surge of mail-in voting this year due to the coronavirus pandemic allowed Biden to steadily gain ground on the president. As the tallying continued and we entered into the morning hours last Wednesday, the former vice president officially pulled ahead of Trump at around 5am, at a point where approximately 89% of the expected vote had been reported. Biden was projected the winner of Wisconsin later on Wednesday afternoon in a very close race, proving that Trump's highly skewed early returns there were indeed a "red mirage."

While Biden was making headway and ultimately winning the state of Wisconsin, the vote count trends were progressing in a similar fashion in the important neighboring state of Michigan as well. Like Wisconsin, Michigan was a state that Democrats had prioritized winning back in this year's presidential election, after Trump narrowly won both states back in 2016. On top of the expected "red mirages" in the two states because of the order of tallying ballots, election analysts also understood another important factor when it comes to monitoring vote returns which would initially appear to show Trump taking a substantial early lead over Biden: the fact that Democratic stronghold areas tend to be higher population centers which usually take longer to report their results. This was definitely a noticeable occurrence in both Wisconsin and Michigan. In the former, the final vote tabulations in the state came from the city of Milwaukee and its surrounding counties, areas that are reliably Democratic-leaning and which put the former vice president over the top against Trump as election officials concluded their counts. The same began to happen in Michigan, where Biden was boosted on Wednesday morning and afternoon by the slower vote returns in the heavily populated city of Detroit and its metropolitan area. Once the final results began to be calculated in Michigan, Biden was able to jump ahead of Trump and was projected to be the winner shortly after the identical trend transpired in Wisconsin.

After former vice president Biden was declared the winner in both Wisconsin and Michigan, all eyes shifted focus to the critical uncalled states of Pennsylvania, Georgia, Arizona, and Nevada. At this point in the race, Biden had clinched a total of 253 electoral votes, while Trump sat at 214, in each candidate's quest for the needed 270. The four aforementioned states are worth 20, 16, 11, and 6 electoral college votes, respectively. In Pennsylvania and Georgia, Trump was attempting to hold on to leads, while Biden was steadily making up ground on the incumbent president. Contrastingly, in Arizona, the opposite was taking place, as the former vice president had established a notable lead on election night and was trying to fend off Trump as each new batch of votes was reported in the southwestern state. In Nevada, a state which has trended Democratic for years, Biden got out to a lead early on and was able to gradually grow his advantage in the subsequent days after the election.

By the early hours of Friday morning, and unsurprisingly to political analysts based on the way the vote tallies were consistently trending, Biden had caught up and taken the lead in the vital electoral prize states of Pennsylvania and Georgia. He was also increasing his lead in Nevada, and while Trump was able to narrow his deficit a bit in Arizona, the former vice president still maintained an advantage there as well – leaving Biden ahead in all 4 of these yet-to-be decided states. A winner had additionally not yet been determined in the states of Alaska and North Carolina, where Trump was leading, but there was less of a focus on those two states because they were not gamechangers in the overall outcome of the presidential race like the other aforementioned 4 were. Following continuing vote tabulations throughout the course of the day last Friday, Biden entered the early hours of Saturday morning with a 20,000+ ballot lead in Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Nevada, while also holding a lead of around 4,000 votes in the state of Georgia. Finally, late Saturday morning just prior to 12pm, multiple networks and outlets were able to safely



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conclude that Biden's lead in Pennsylvania had become insurmountable. By projecting him as the winner in the Keystone State, Biden had now surpassed the needed 270 electoral college vote-threshold, and was officially declared the president-elect of the United States.

The victory of president-elect Joe Biden and vice-president elect Kamala Harris is significant in several different ways. Firstly, the expected final vote total marks the highest turnout among eligible citizens in a presidential race since 1900, and the 75+ million ballots that were cast for the Biden-Harris ticket are the most ever for a presidential and vice-presidential candidate. The high turnout numbers are even more impressive and commendable considering that this year's race took place during the midst of a global health pandemic. While it is difficult to know whether voter enthusiasm was up due to the high stakes of the election or simply because citizens were given more opportunities to participate in the process as a result of the current health climate, there is certainly an argument to be made that the latter helped lead to more civic engagement this time around. The historic number of people who either voted early or by mail may lend itself to the idea that officials should expand access to these methods even during normal times. Secondly, this year's election is noteworthy because Vice President-elect Harris becomes not only the first person of color to be elected vice president, but also the first woman to be elected as either president or vice president in American history. Additionally, the 2020 race witnessed a sitting president fail to win re-election to a second term in office, something that had not happened since President George H.W. Bush fell short of doing so almost 30 years ago back in 1992. Lastly, one final important takeaway is that unfortunately, this election is sure to increase skepticism towards pollsters and political forecasters, a sentiment that had already been growing since 2016. Like they were 4 years ago, and arguably to an even further extent, the actual margins in many states and races – both at the presidential and congressional level – were a lot narrower than had been predicted beforehand.

In sharp contrast from normal presidential tradition, President Trump has yet to make a concession speech or make contact with the new president-elect. The race has been called in Biden's favor by multiple news and media outlets, and Trump trails by a range of 10,000 to 146,000 votes in even the closest margin states like Georgia, Wisconsin, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. The president has filed lawsuits challenging votes in several states, and has requested a recount in Wisconsin. As mentioned, Trump is behind Biden by tens to hundreds of thousands in these places, and at best recounts only change the margin by a few hundred votes – if any. Trump has also not presented viable or substantiated evidence to back his "election fraud" claims, and therefore legal experts contend that any challenges will not hold merit in a court of law. Free and fair elections, and the seamless transition of power, are fundamental aspects of American democracy and as such analysts lament the president's reaction and his attempts to undermine the electoral process.