

Trump's Uphill Battle to 270

A Candidacy Briefing

Foster Hillis | October 30th, 2020

Introduction

On June 16th, 2015, unbeknownst to the general American public (and the rest of the world), the United States' perception would be changed *forever*. That day will live in infamy as it was when then business mogul, reality investor, and most notably reality TV host of the "*The Apprentice*" Donald J. Trump announced his candidacy for the highest office in our land. After a hard, controversial, and long campaign against the unarguably more qualified Secretary Hillary Clinton, Trump secured the 45th Presidency of the United States with 306 Electoral College (EC) Votes ("2016 Presidential Election Actual Results" 2016).

In an unorthodox manner, Trump announced and filed with the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) his reelection campaign *literally hours* before he was sworn into office on that cold January 20th, 2020 morning (Taylor). Awkwardly, both his former opponent Clinton and his current opponent Vice President Joe Biden, were *mere feet* from Trump (Huang and McKeague 2017) when he took the ultimate oath to *preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.*

> ***In 2016, Trump faced an uphill battle to win, but as I write this briefing, he is in a worse place.***

In 2016, Trump faced an uphill battle to win, but as I write this briefing, he is in a worse place. Somehow Trump has managed to forfeit the advantages that incumbents hold when running for reelection. His Administration and Campaign have been riddled with scandal, controversy, and outright illegal *quid pro quos* from day one. However, Trump now faces the ultimate enemy—one that we can't even see—*the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.*

This briefing will cover the background of both his Administration and Campaign's failure to garner the same support he had in 2016, and then a strategy to mobilize his shrinking voting base, convert Independent and weak Democratic voters, and encourage Biden voters not to turn out. I will outline those points in a three strategy: (1) cover-up Trump's failures (especially those relating to COVID-19) with an



Trump's now infamous photo of him holding a Bible upside down at a Church he doesn't attend after ordering protestors to be tear gassed.

increase of information (fact, fiction, and in between) through Trump's digital image, (2) highlight how Biden's plans could hurt Americans, and (3) choreograph an unmeasurable GOTV and simultaneous KTVO (Keep the Voters Out) campaign.

This all will be laid out; however, as I turn this in, there are only four days until November 3rd, which with the enormous amount of mail-in and early voters we have had this year, might make it too late to turn the Campaign around. In other words… November 3rd is not the day that we all vote; it's the last day Voters can have their voice hear. This is Trump's Uphill Battle to 270.November 3rd, which with the enormous amount of mail-in and early voters we have had this year, might make it too late to turn the Campaign around. In other words… November 3rd is not the day that we all vote; it's the last day Voters can have their voice hear. This is *Trump's Uphill Battle to 270.*

Background

Where can one even start when summarizing the past 5-years that we have had Trump in Campaign mode? Trump's Campaign—from day one— has been riddled by controversy. Trump, plain and simple, is a racist (Lopez 2016), sexist (Darweesh and Abdullah 2016), homophobic (Baume 2020), and nationalistic-fascist (McNeill 2020); but what is scarier than one man embodying all of those discriminatory views—is that *the American Electorate overlooked and supported all of that.* However, it is popularly theorized that Trump voters didn't vote because of what he could do for them; Trump voters *supported him for what he would do against others.* This is an aspect of the Campaign that Trump has tried to harp on, but for one reason or another, he is not getting the same breakthrough as before.

While not paramount to presidential campaigns, Trump lost the 2016 election by 2,868,686 votes to Clinton (Trump: 62,984,828, Clinton: 65,853,514); however, he won the important numbers: he won by 77 Electoral College votes (Trump: 304, Clinton: 227) (Leamon and Bucelato 2016). Once again plain and simple, Trump ran a *smaller yet smarter* campaign than Clinton's and came out victorious. In fact, his ground game is almost incomparable with Clinton's, with her having 5,138 staffers in 15 states (both directly employed and via the DNC and state parties), while Trump only had 1,409 staffers in 16 states (Wilson and Disipio 2016). I bring these numbers up because presidential candidates run for the popular vote first coupled with the EC votes; however, Trump ran on the EC vote superior to the popular vote.

I am not trying to degrade the Trump Campaign in my past paragraphs, I am just trying to highlight how surprising it was to many Political Scientists that Trump won. In fact, Trump's Campaign received massive blows (created by himself) to his campaign throughout the primaries and the general election.

On *day one* of Trump's Campaign, he called Mexican immigrants "rapists" and "drug dealers" (and throughout his Campaign many other degrading statements) (Phillips 2017). Later he said that Senator John McCain was "not a war hero. He's a war hero because he was captured. I like people

who weren't captured" (Stracqualursi 2016); this comment is still *biting him in the butt* as the McCain family is now actively campaigning for Biden (Sprunt 2020). And one more troubling statement he made, while speaking at a rally, "I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters" (Diamond 2016). While all of these statements are very troubling, they outline some fundamental characteristics that voters wanted out of a president—someone who didn't care about being politically correct and spoke their minds. These examples show us that, even though Trump is clearly in the wrong, that his supporters blindly follow his lead—something that helped him enormously in the 2016 election, but now many Americans (specifically those who voted for him in 2016 but now are voting for Biden) are catching on. Those people, those "flippers," are the supporters that Trump *desperately* needs to come back to his column to secure his reelection.

Falling back to the 2016 primaries before we start talking about now is essential because we need to see how he received the nomination and subsequent Presidency. First, specifically registered Republicans



Trump riding his gold elevator down to announce his Presidency.

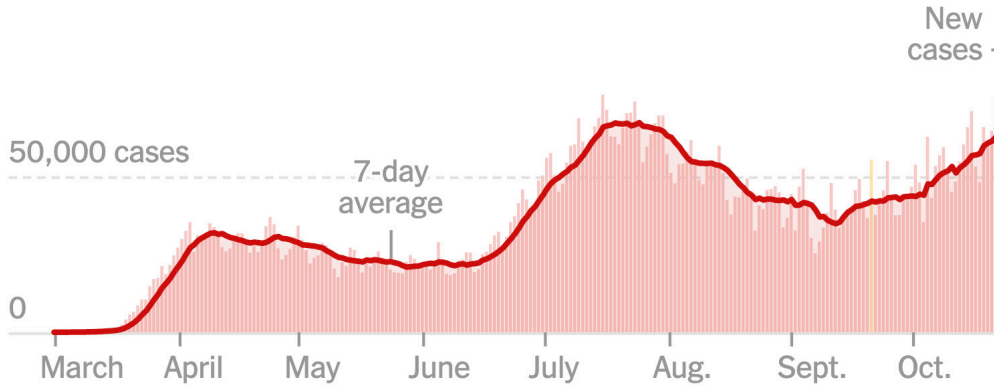
and lean right Independents trended toward an "outsider" for Presidency during the 2016 cycle (Theiss-Morse et al. 2018). Secondly, and most important for low-interest voters, the stream of endorsements from other nationally known Republicans were few and far between. In fact, only 35% of sitting Republican Governors, Senators, and Representatives endorsed a candidate before the Iowa caucus (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). This little amount is only comparable to the 1980 presidential race, in which both of these cycles had a slow endorsement track. This led many voters to listen to the media instead of their trusted representatives. Finally, and with the aforementioned points' help, Trump held an almost dictatorial control of the press. With the flick of his thumb and a press of the tweet button, Trump could control what the media talked

about for hours to actual days (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). He purposely made inflammatory statements; in fact, a CNN commentator went so far as to say, "He'll [Trump] throw a hand grenade in, and then will come on to talk to us about it" (Blaine 2016). In addition to his control, even though Trump was mentioned on the news much more than other candidates, he was almost immune to the few attacks from other national campaigns and the media. In fact, according to the "Identity Crisis" by Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, "[the] coverage of Trump was not particularly negative, either overall or relative to other candidates" (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). This shows that Trump had a Teflon resistance to negative media attention (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). With Trump being the ultimate outsider and the lack of endorsements coupled with the fact that Trump was talked about the most on the news, led Trump to an easy Republican Nomination and victory.

> ***"He'll throw a hand grenade in, and then will come on to talk to us about it."***
> *(Blane 2016)*

Moving into his Presidency, Trump has accomplished quite a lot; the question remains of whom he helped, but I will not answer that here. As of October 22nd, Trump has appointed 215 Supreme Court, Circuit Court, and District Judges to the bench for a lifetime appointment in his first term, a huge amount compared to Obama's 313 appointments over two terms (Federal Court System 2020). Trump has also had huge strides in increasing the size of our Military, with the addition of the Space Force. However, coupled with the Military, he has left the United States in a questionable stance with our Allies (Haltiwanger 2020). Finally, although in the moment, many thought this would be the most significant controversy of his Presidency, Trump was Impeached. While his Impeachment did not lead to a conviction or removal from the Senate, there was clear and convincing evidence of a *quid pro quo* with foreign actors (which is very similar to his collusion with Russia during the 2016 election, but I digress) (Nadler 2019). All of his actions are unimportant; currently, because of the largest public health crisis, the United States has seen in a very long time.

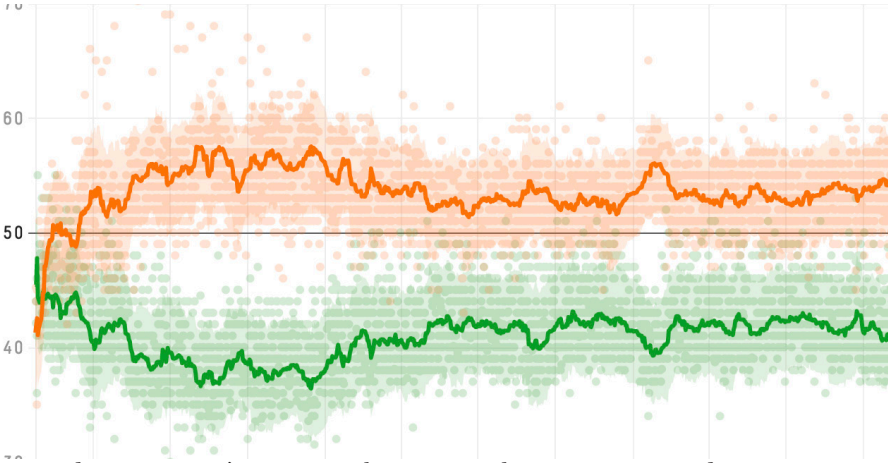
As just mentioned, every positive and negative action that Trump has had in office has now been overshadowed by



COVID-19 case count with a 7-day rolling average. March 1st, 2020 – October 28th, 2020.

the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. With the first reported case of COVID-19 being reported 304 days ago (Fan et al. 2020), one would think that the United States and other countries could have already put a stop to the disease. However, due to Trump's downplaying of the deadly disease and failure to act, as of October 21st, 2020, the US has had over 8.3 million cases and 221,948 deaths (New York Times 2020). Meaning, with the use of the latest Census data, almost 3% of Americans have had a reported case of COVID-19, and 1 in every 1,500 Americans have died (US Census Bureau 2019). According to the CDC, the demographics that have been hit the hardest by the virus are older individuals, males, and African Americans (Garg, Kim, and Whitaker 2020); and according to Business Insider, small businesses and industries such as hospitality, travel, and bar/ restaurants have been hit the hardest (Business Insider 2020).

Now, what has Trump done to combat the COVID-19 pandemic? He has downplayed the virus, subjected not only his supporters but all Americans to the virus, and even got the virus himself. Many of Trump's opponents, including Biden, have called out Trump for downplaying COVID-19's effects. It was a he-said-she-said debate, but during an interview with Bob Woodward, he admitted to downplaying the virus on March 19th (the start of the outbreak in the US). He told Woodard, "I wanted to always play it down" (Segers and Watson 2020). This, coupled with the fact that he was reluctant to wear a mask himself publicly and him going as far as saying that having COVID-19 was a "badge of honor" (Summers 2020), doesn't align well with the needed closures and policies to secure the Nation. Additionally, Trump, to this day, has not implemented any widespread mask mandate. The final *nail in the coffin* was when Trump himself tested positive for COVID-19. That



President Trump's approval rating; where orange is disapprove & green is approve. From January 23rd, 2020 - October 29th, 2020.

hurt all of his chances of continuing to downplay the virus. Many believed that his already horrible health would have made him succumb to the virus or if he did survive that he would use his experience to start mandating masks, lockdowns, and other needed measures—none of which have occurred. I could go on for days about Trump's mismanagement of the virus, but all of this can be best portrayed through his *consistently* falling polling numbers.

Before diving into Trump's polling numbers against Biden, it is crucial to look back at his overall Presidency. According to 538 Politics, Trump had a positive net favorability for only his first 14 days in office among US adults (Silver 2017). That low (and even negative) long-term rating for a President has not been seen in recent history (Jarvis 2020). Even if you like what Trump has done for or against a population of the US, he is not a well-liked President, plain and simple.

Moving into the polls against Biden, as one might expect after reading the background that I have laid out, Trump is losing. According to 538 Politics, on October 25th, Trump only has a 12% chance of winning, with Biden taking the supermajority chances of winning at 87% (Silver 2020). However, as I outlined in a candidacy briefing for Biden, Clinton and Trump were in the same situation just four years ago, with Hilary having a 71% chance of winning on election day according to the 538 predictions (Hillis 2020). A Biden victory is not unbeknownst to most, as Biden since June 1st has been the favorite to win in all of 538's predictions, but now his margin is the largest we have seen.

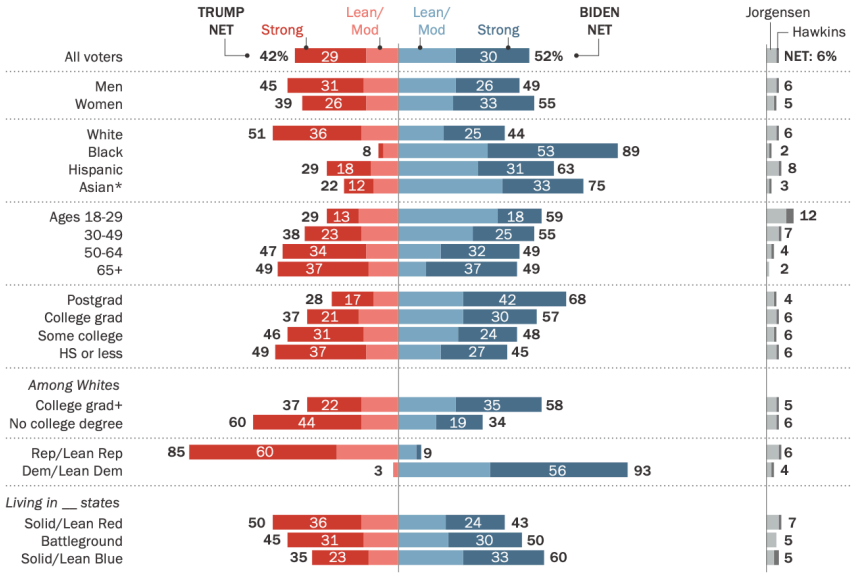
Even when you break down some of the polls into demographics and take each's voting power, Trump is not in a good place. The following information is from the Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy 2020).[1] Trump is winning the white vote with a 51 to 44 split, but Biden is

winning the Black, Hispanic, and Asain voters with much larger points (8/89, 29/63, and 22/75 respectively). Trump is also losing out in the 1170os9/59), 30-49 (38/55), and just barely the 50-64 (47/49) year old voting blocks and holds a tie in the 65+ range (49/49). A demographic that is very surprising is the voters in certain solid and lean "color" states and battleground states, of which Trump loses out in the three categories listed. In solid and red states Trump holds his ground with 50/43 split (a 7-point net Trump), but Biden's grasp is stronger when we look at solid and lean blue states with a 35/60 (a 25-point net Biden) split. More importantly, however, Biden holds stronger support in battle grounds with a 45/50 (a 5-point net Biden) split. All of this to means that Trump is not in a good place, currently.

It is outlandish that with all that Trump has gone through, what I laid out and other major scandals (the Access Hollywood tapes, the Muller Report, his dog whistling of white supremacy going as far as tear gassing protestors for a photo-op, and too many others to list), that we, the United States electorate, still can conceivably see a 2nd term for Trump. He is going to need to see large scale polling errors and a tremendous increase of support (and a simultaneous loss of support for Biden) if he is to assume a second victory. Trump would need some October surprise (although October is almost already over) like the scale of the FBI Director James Comey letter in the 2016 election. Without either of those events and even if the upcoming strategy is taken wholeheartedly into play, there is not but an *uphill battle to 270.*

Trump leads among White voters, trails by wide margins among Black, Hispanic and Asian voters

% of registered voters who would vote for __ if the 2020 presidential election were being held today



*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Notes: Based on registered voters. No answer responses not shown. "Other" candidates include those who say they are voting for Jorgensen, Hawkins or someone else. White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. See appendix for details about battleground states.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 30-Oct. 5, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Pew Research Center study on Trump Vs. Biden supporters.

Strategy

As I just laid out, Trump's campaign is underwater. His campaign and him must act swiftly to secure the victory on November 3rd, but like I mentioned in the introduction, there are just four days until the most consequential day of his presidency, the reelection. Trump must hope that it is not too little or too late. I hope to pose a three-point strategy to not secure him the national popular vote, but the more important Electoral College. (1) Trump must cover up his failures to the American people while also (2) highlighting how a transfer of power to a Biden Administration could hurt the average American. He can do both of these through a massive information and disinformation plan with an emphasis in the digital media environment. This must be supported by a once again (3) massive GOTV and KTVO strategy to ensure that Trump supporters get to the polls while Biden supports stay at home.

According to the New York Times, Biden has a confirmed 212 EC votes with Trump holding 125 (Holder and Burns 2020). Trump should lay those plans out in the following lean & undecided battleground states: Florida (29 votes), Georgia (16 votes), Iowa (6 votes), Maine's 2nd District (1 vote), North Carolina (15 votes), Ohio (18 votes), and the surprisingly only lean state of Texas (38 votes). If Trump can win those aforementioned states, he still must secure an additional 22 EC votes from the following lean Biden states: Arizona (11 votes), Michigan (16 votes), Minnesota (10 votes), Nebraska's 2nd District (1 vote), Nevada (6 votes), New Hamisure (4 votes), Pennsylvania (20 votes), and Wisconsin (10 votes).

Trump's Needed Coverup of His Failures

Just as I outlined in the background, Trump has had many more failures as President than successes. This is emphasised with his negative approval rating from the following polls all published on October 21st: Economist/YouGov: -9 points (45/54), CNBC/Change Research: -12 points (44/56), Gallup: -12 points (43/55), Politico/Morning Consult -12 points (43/55), and Reuters/Ipsos: -16 points (42/58).[2] This all comes to mean that Trump must take account (but not responsibility) of what has happened and continue

to blame others for those failures. With that, he also must include the messaging that he is the best man for the job. That would be in line with his 2016 strategy of "draining the swamp" (although he has done nothing of the like).

This can be obtained by creating an all out chaos environment in the digital media, meaning both on social media and in the digital mass-media. This is also inline with his campaign strategy in 2016. Trump has started this by questioning the legitimacy of not only mail-in and absentee ballots (although they are the same) but the outcome of the election and has foreshadowed not accepting a peaceful transfer of power. With all of this, Trump is creating voter fatigue, especially of those who do not support him, by making those people hear his constant messaging of him being the victim.

Highlighting Biden's Destructive Policies

Also in line with his 2016 strategy (although replacing Clinton with Biden), Trump must continue touting all out lies about Biden's policies in order to create a false narrative for Biden to fix. One of the best examples is Trump's portrayal of Biden's tax plan as raising everyone's taxes. Although Biden's plan wouldn't raise taxes unless you make more than $400,000 a year (Joe Biden Campaign n.d.), the best talking point that any Republican has is lowering taxes. Another example to harp on is Biden's health care policies. While Biden is in support of expanding the Affordable Care Act (Joe Biden Campaign, n.d.), Trump has already done a great job at undermining this, at the 2nd Presidential debate, by saying that what Biden is trying to enact is "socialized medicine" and that his new policies would "terminate [coverage] all of those policies. These are people that love their healthcare... 180 million people, families" (Conklin 2020). While Trump is referring to the 180 million people that receive health care through their employment and not just by themselves (making his claim mostly misleading), he does a good job at aiding a scare tactic. That is what Trump is best at, truly, and he needs to do more of them.

GOTV & KTVO

At the end of the day, who cares about polls or how much a candidate has raised in a certain quarter, when all that matters is the final tally of the ballot box? The most critical phase of

any campaign, especially of one that is losing, is their ability to turn out the vote. A new development of this election, although we have had a mail-in and absentee voting since the 1700's (Waxman 2020), is the widespread use of the system. No other election before this, in US history, has had the alternative voting method have the level ascendancy that we have seen this cycle. Trump must, at very least, ensure that his base is not only supporting him, but actually taking the time out of their day to get up and go vote. It is even more critical now, that those registered to vote actually follow through with their civic participation, because in many states it is already too late to register to vote. In fact, only 21 states and DC allow for same-day registration (Panetta 2020).

Furthermore, although in a gray area of the law, the Trump campaign should utilize a KOTV (keep out the vote) strategy to ensure that weak supporters of Biden do not follow through on their intentions. This has already been at work in many Republican controlled states with many of them imposing mass voter suppression laws, in this specific election alone (Anderson 2019). These laws include anything from purging voter rolls, enacting strict registration deadlines, voter ID laws, and barring former felons from voting, all of which in theory and practice bar left leaning voters from having their voice heard (Lempinen 2020). That being said, it has just been reported that the Trump campaign already has a list of voters that they want to stay home ("Revealed: Trump Campaign Strategy to Deter Millions of Black Americans from Voting in 2016" 2020). According to a cache of data, the Trump campaign had information on 200 million Americans and had 3.5 million Afarican Americans listed as "deterrence." That distinction would allow the campaign to put that information into ads so that certain ads would show to certain groups of people (in this case ads that would lead people not to vote were shown to the "deterrence" category). Trump simply needs more emphasis on that data category. The impact of that category and that of voter suppression laws could be the difference between a Trump or Biden presidency.

Conclusion

Now, with all of this background and strategy talk out of the way, what can one make out of all of this? One, Trump needs to take a look back at what he has done successfully and use that to catapult himself into a new presidency. Two, Trump needs to fight dirty, after all Biden is already taking the high ground with his "*Battle for the Soul of the Nation*" slogan. And three, although I don't like saying this, Trump needs to be himself—at the end of the day the people want a raw and "tell it like you mean it" President right now.



President Trump speaking at his first campagin ralley of 2020.

The Trump Campaign, in order to garner the amount of support that it needs within the next four days, must cover up his failures to the American public, especially his mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. He must highlight (truthfully or with intentional lies) how Biden's plans and policies could hurt the average American. And he must devise a GOTV strategy coupled with a KOTV campaign in the likes that we have not ever seen before.

With all of this, Trump should be aware that an "October Surprise" could be lurking around any corner of any day. However, since we are so close to the election and since so many voters are voting early, by mail, or by absentee ballot, I would not be too fearful that such a large event could make any substantial changes to hinder his already bismal numbers.

A break from all of the negative numbers however, Trump needs to realize that he was in the same situation just four short years ago. His campaign was a flop, his numbers were underwater, and he was projected to lose. Trump should continue moving through the next few days with the mindset that an unordinary,

unplanned, and unprepared for change in the ballot box could mean a huge win for him (and possibly for down-ballot Republicans). This is all to say, that Trump needs this victory, not only if he wants to stay in power, but because the rath of investigations that can and most likely will happen if he is voted out of office (Third Way 2020). Although this is fun to think about, I must digress and say that Trump has a seriously steep *uphill battle to 270*.

Footnotes

[1] All of the percentages given, unless noted otherwise will be Trump/Biden.

[2] All of the percentages given, unless noted otherwise will be Trump/Biden.



President Trump getting onto Air Force One.

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