

ELECTION 2020: INSIGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES

With Contributions from:

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INTRODUCTION

Andrew Gordon, Senior Vice President and Head of Credit Strategies

Presidential elections are always consequential. Democrats and Republicans have significant differences in their governing philosophy and vision, which in turn impact many facets of life, including social, cultural, economic, and political aspects. With the country reeling from a global pandemic, civil unrest, millions unemployed, and an economic contraction without precedent, much is on the line in November 2020.

At GLG, we know that insight comes from both sides of the aisle. In the run-up to the election, we have and will continue to organize numerous teleconferences, webcasts, and roundtables illuminating both Republican and Democrat perspectives. This eBook compiles what we've done so far.

In these pages you will find the perspective of six different experts, all of whom shared their unique take on the 2020 election:

ROBBY MOOK, former Presidential Campaign Manager for Hillary Clinton, who discusses the challenges of voting during a pandemic, the threat of voter disenfranchisement, and whether Biden's health is a real factor in the election.

DAVID PLOUFFE, former Presidential Campaign Manager for Barack Obama, who discusses the strategies behind running a successful campaign, how Biden can maintain his lead, and how campaigns evolve as it comes closer to Election Day.

MATTHEW BUTLER, former Chief of Staff at the Democratic National Committee, who shares why he thinks that Biden is in a good position to win the presidency, state-by-state polls, fundraising, and what looks to be Biden's key policies if he is elected.

TYLER BROWN, former Director of Digital Strategy at the Republican National Committee, who talks about digital campaigns, the difference between conventional and digital media, and his evaluation of each camp's digital efforts so far.

SCOTT JENNINGS, former Senior Advisor for the Jeb Bush for President Campaign, who talks about the pros and cons of mail-in voting, the Republican Party platform, and how the conversations surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the ensuing economic recession, and ongoing civic unrest will evolve as we get closer to November.

DAVID MASON, former Chairman of the Federal Election Commission, who discusses the logistics of mail-in voting vs. in-person, government regulations and litigation possibilities, and expectations about how quickly we might see a final result and what that might mean.

No matter who wins in November, reverberations will last a long time. The issues we're facing now — COVID-19, racial injustice, national security, and economic opportunity — will evolve but likely take different paths depending upon the victorious party.

As we approach Election Day and move beyond it, GLG will continue to provide the perspectives you need to make the smartest decisions. Stay tuned to the [Insights](#) section of GLG's website for insight into the election and the world that we live in today.

DEMOCRAT PERSPECTIVE:

Slouching Toward November: Presidential Election Forecast

Robby Mook, former Presidential Campaign Manager for Hillary Clinton

The 2020 presidential election promises to be both a contentious and a consequential one. With the specter of COVID-19 hovering over the proceedings and the hazard of voter disenfranchisement, the threat to a free and fair election is very real. GLG sat down with Robby Mook, the former Presidential Campaign Manager for Hillary Clinton, to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the election, the challenge to mail-in ballots, and strategies that the Biden campaign will likely implement as November nears. The wide-ranging discussion is condensed here for clarity and space.

Given the ongoing pandemic in the U.S., how can we ensure getting to the polls, and why hasn't the Democratic National Convention or other organizations tried to figure out a digital voting system?

The problem – or perhaps the strength, depending on your perspective – of the American election system is that voting is controlled by the 50 states. Many states delegate that power down to localities, which translates to more than 8,000 individual jurisdictions that have sovereign control of their elections. The federal government is not permitted to step in and demand uniform standards. Many people don't understand that.

Regarding digital voting, there's a lot of cross-pressure ideologically on this issue. The GOP tends to resist any change to voting whatsoever. Many Democrats concerned about election integrity consider a physical paper ballot the most secure voting method and don't like digital voting either. So, it's not likely you'll see very much innovation in this space. People might be more open to it in the future, but considering that the attacks in 2016 came in the digital domain, you'll likely see continuing trepidation to experiment with voting online.

COVID-19 will continue to be a concern in November, so absentee ballots will likely be essential to a fair democratic election. How significant an issue will this become? And should we anticipate efforts to obstruct or complicate absentee voting?

Absentee ballots – we should really call it voting by mail or voting from home – will be very important. There are two issues to consider.

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With COVID-19, we talked about “flattening the curve” to prevent the medical system from getting overwhelmed. I think we need to take the same approach with voting. We should think about voting as a 30-day period with voting by mail or in-person voting spread out as evenly as possible over that time, so the system doesn’t get overwhelmed and facilities aren’t crowded on Election Day. There should be a big public affairs push to get people returning ballots early. Sadly, I don’t see that happening, in no small part because resistance from President Trump makes it hard for some local officials to act.

The irony is, Republicans often perform better with voting by mail than Democrats in many jurisdictions. I suspect they believe many seniors vote by mail already, but they don’t want to expand or encourage vote by mail for younger people. I think this is a mistake for them, because it’s voters in rural areas who’ll suffer most when polling places consolidate to accommodate for COVID-19.

What’s also concerning is that some states are considering proactively mailing ballots out to all registered voters who have actively participated in elections in the past, making it easier for them to vote. That means that young people who aren’t yet registered and/or will be voting for the first time, or people who only vote occasionally, will have to work harder to cast their ballot (i.e., request a ballot instead of having it mailed automatically). This is where litigation is important; the courts may force officials to send ballots to everyone.

What kinds of actions are being taken to ensure that black and other minorities votes are encouraged and included?

This really falls on the Democratic Party. We’ve got to do better than we did in 2016 in achieving turnout. Biden will have to strike a balance between demonstrating how Trump has failed and providing a reason for people to get excited about voting for him versus just against Trump. That can be challenging. The fact is, the Democratic Party is significantly more diverse than the Republicans. There are many communities of color, and our voters are much younger. Biden must appeal to all of them and give them an affirmative reason to feel motivated to cast their ballot for him.

Could Joe Biden’s age be a decisive handicap? And how is he planning to overcome it?

Trump’s not exactly young himself. Nonetheless, I think Trump is going to try to turn this into an issue. Trump tends to take his own vulnerabilities and projects them on his opponents. His health is quite poor. I’m sure he’ll do everything he can to try to make Joe Biden sound unhealthy.

The bigger issue here is Biden needs to make this election about Donald Trump. If we’re spending enormous amounts of time litigating whether Biden is too old or too young, or good enough on this, good enough on that, then we’re actually losing. This needs to be a change election, and voters need to see Biden as the agent of that change.

On both sides, who are the likely candidates for vice presidency? And how decisive could that be?

When I worked with Hillary [Clinton] on this issue, we used the following framework: The most important thing is to choose someone you like and trust and feel you can work with. Ultimately, you have to believe this person is ready to serve as president of the United States. Second, it's important to choose someone who does no harm to the ticket and isn't going to be a problem or liability in some way. Finally, it's worth asking if someone is going to bring value to the ticket. But I very deliberately put that at the end of this list, whereas the media will typically put it first.

This is a subjective matter, but I believe a vice presidential nominee can reinforce what you already have as a candidate. It's harder for them to somehow transform the ticket into something it wasn't before. A good example is Sarah Palin with John McCain. He tried to pick this young woman governor who was a little bit more ideological. And it just didn't work well. They clearly didn't see eye to eye, and she ended up hurting, not augmenting, his campaign. Maybe Al Gore with Bill Clinton is an example where I think he really reinforced Bill Clinton's strengths.

Biden has said he's going to pick a woman. I think most people see Kamala Harris as the most likely. Keisha Lance Bottoms, the mayor of Atlanta, has emerged recently as another contender. And Val Demmings, a Member of Congress from the Orlando area, has emerged as well. So it could come down to these three, but I assume this list will evolve as we get closer.

Although I think voters make their choice based on the presidential nominee – not the VP – this choice will probably be more important for Biden than it's been for candidates in the past, because people will look for signals that he's going to bring in a new generation and make the party leadership more diverse.

This article is adapted from the May 2020, GLG teleconference "U.S. Presidential Election Forecast."

DEMOCRAT PERSPECTIVE:

What Are the Campaign Strategies that Can Win?

David Plouffe, former Campaign Manager for Barack Obama

Recently, David Plouffe, the former campaign manager for Barack Obama and current board member of the liberal nonprofit ACRONYM, sat down for a 60-minute virtual session with select GLG clients.

As Obama assumed office, Plouffe was initially an outside senior advisor to the President. After David Axelrod's resignation, he was appointed as a Senior Advisor to the President in 2011. Prior to joining Obama's team, Plouffe was partner at AKPD Message and Media, a campaign consulting firm.

Before Plouffe's session, we asked about his thoughts on the upcoming presidential election.

Most polls show Biden to be the clear favorite over Trump, but November is still a long way off. What are the most important things the Biden team can do to maintain and/or increase their lead going into November?

Biden is about at his ceiling with swing voters. They need to focus on maintaining as much of the current support he has built up, especially with seniors. Filling in the blanks for voters about what he will do concretely as president and how he will more effectively manage the COVID-19 crisis is key. Strong debate performances where he can show he is up to the job will also be essential. Enthusiasm for Biden among younger voters is strengthening but still below where you'd feel comfortable. The Biden campaign needs to make continual progress on that measure.

The persistence of COVID-19, a depressed economy, and the heightened awareness of systemic racism will doubtlessly be key factors in November. How do you expect the two camps to grapple with these issues?

COVID-19 and the economy are linked. The central question on all swing voters' minds this fall will be which of these two men can manage the crisis in the near term, oversee the delivery and adoption of a vaccine, and take steps to heal a wounded economy. It is the campaign in many respects.



The protests over racism so far seem to be helping Biden politically to date. Trump sees this issue as his “trump card” so to speak, so we will witness every day whether his “law and order” thrust changes that dynamic.

How important is Biden’s choice of running mate? Where do you think he’ll land and what are the political considerations that might go into making that decision?

At least 90% of this decision will not be political, it will be based on governing. He went through this process once, was selected, and served in the role for two terms. He will make his selection based on who he thinks will be his most effective and trusted partner in the White House, not the campaign trail. Politically, the only mistake Biden could make is picking someone who voters do not think is ready to be president or picking someone who swing voters believe is out of the step with their views and values. In that case, Trump’s campaign would suggest you are really voting for “X”, not Biden.

How important is a well-run campaign (e.g., “ground game,” organizing, advertising, etc.) to winning a presidential election vs. the behavior/performance of a candidate? How much influence does a candidate have in running a presidential campaign, and how has that changed with COVID-19 and the evolution of social media in the past decade?

The candidate and the political and issue environment are the big things. Campaigns matter on the margins. But a close race is decided on the margins, so in those scenarios, a superior campaign can make the difference.

Some presidential candidates — like Reagan, both Bushes, and Obama — are fairly hands-off on most details in their campaigns. They focus on their speeches, debates, and key decisions but delegate most of the rest. Others — like Clinton and Trump — are intimately involved and essentially serve as their own de facto campaign manager.

Social media is the new public square, so a successful organization thinks, acts, and resources digital first. We will learn many things about how COVID-19 will affect and has affected this election. But one thing for sure will be that a historically high number of votes will be cast by mail. That creates challenges for the campaigns, to ensure not only as many of their supporters as possible vote by mail, but that they also do so correctly so their ballot gets counted. And it creates huge issues for elections officials, who concerningly right now are not ready for the tsunami of mail-in ballots to come, especially if record voter turnout occurs as some experts predict.

Social media is the new public square, so a successful organization thinks, acts, and resources digital first



A presidential campaign reviews data and modeling every day.

In general, how do campaigns make decisions as they move closer to November? How do strategies and/or tactics change as Election Day approaches? When and how should they be reactive to world events or their opposition?

Decisions are made almost exclusively in the battleground states based on the campaign's internal data. Where to spend more money on advertising. Where to spend less or stop based on how they are doing with key voter cohorts in key geographic areas. What interviews the candidate, VP, and surrogates conduct. Where they travel (if that's an option this fall).

A presidential campaign reviews data and modeling every day to assess where they are exceeding their vote goals, meeting them, and falling short. They try other research methods and intuition to understand why. Decisions large and small all flow from each campaign's sense of where the race stands at that moment.

DEMOCRAT PERSPECTIVE:

Why Biden Is in a Strong Position to Win the Presidency

Matthew Butler, former Chief of Staff at the Democratic National Committee

What are former Vice President Joe Biden's chances to win the presidency in November? What will his priorities be if he's the next commander in chief?

To get the Democratic perspective, GLG spoke with Matthew Butler, former Chief of Staff at the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Below are a few select excerpts from our broader discussion.

Where do you see things standing coming out of the Democratic National Convention?

Overall, Biden is in a strong position to win the presidency. Biden is coming off a weird but compelling convention. The Democrats did a good job coming up with a strong narrative and drew incredibly clear contrast between Biden and Trump. The picture they repeated was that Biden is a good and decent person; we'd be in good hands with him as president. He gave a strong speech. He presented himself as president-in-waiting. People compared it to a State of the Union address, with many saying it was the best speech that Biden's ever given. Interestingly, he never said Trump's name once.

Former President Barack Obama broke with tradition with such a direct attack on Trump. This allowed Kamala Harris in her speech to just do a bio of herself and present herself in an affable, competent way, when typically, the VP nominee has to be the attack dog. Obama allowed Harris to come out of the gate with a positive message. She has been well received so far. The campaign raised around \$26 million the day after she was announced.

Trump was highly disliked before coronavirus and he's slightly more so now. What we've seen from him for the past four years is that he cares only about himself. He's not doing a particularly good job. Democrats were consistent with their message and were careful. They focused on Trump, the job he's doing, and his character. They did not go after his supporters, which was different from in 2016 — remember Hillary Clinton's comment about "deplorables"? This year, it's really just about Trump, which could pay dividends for Biden.

The other interesting number to look at is the delta between the final polling averages in 2016, where in all those states Clinton was winning but ultimately lost.

How will the pandemic affect the campaign?

Overall, a COVID campaign benefits Biden. Trump wants rallies and adoring crowds. He wants the focus on spectacle, not on substance. That's not where Biden excels. Biden's great in one-on-one or in town hall settings. Also, Biden's not the youngest guy, and presidential campaigns are grueling affairs. Being able to stay mainly in Delaware and connect virtually is to his advantage. His convention speech was particularly important for him to do it just to the camera and not with an audience, because it was a heavy speech in parts. I don't think it would have worked in an arena. There were not a lot of applause lines. You would have had 40,000 people bummed out on national TV, and that visual would not have been great.

How does polling look state by state?

Rolling into the convention, the three most important states that Biden must get back if everything else stays the same were Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Hillary Clinton lost by little more than 38 electoral votes. Biden's got about a 5.7% lead in Pennsylvania, 6.7% in Michigan, and 6.5% in Wisconsin. Those are all down as much as two points from where they were in late June. There's good news for Biden in Florida, where he's about five points up on Trump. If Biden can win Florida and its 29 electoral votes, he'll be in good shape. He would then have to add only one out of Pennsylvania, Michigan, or Wisconsin.

The other interesting number to look at is the delta between the final polling averages in 2016, where in all those states Clinton was winning but ultimately lost. So even though these numbers look favorable for Biden, I do think that there's a chance that the polls will not be representative of the final tally. Biden still has a lot of work to do in these places. I don't think that Trump will perform quite as well because he's been shedding votes, but there is a big delta between the poll numbers and what Trump's performance will be.

What demographics are shifting, specifically groups that don't particularly poll well?

In 2016, Trump won white voters by about 20 points. In the latest polling, Trump's winning those voters by only about 7 points. Trump won men by 12 in 2016, and now he's leading by only 4. White noncollege women is a group that Trump won by 27 points in 2016 — he's up by only 17 now. Trump won with white noncollege men by 48% in 2016; it's down to 32 now. Trump won seniors by 7 in 2016. Now Biden is winning that group by 7. All of that taken together is part of the reason that Biden had this big upswing. Clinton was up nationally 3 to 4 points right before the election, so Biden's roughly double that now. That's before we've seen if there will be a bounce out of the convention. [Ed note: this interview was conducted August 21, 2020, one day after the Democratic Convention.]

65% of Americans favor getting the virus under control over opening schools.

A big issue across the board for so many Americans is around reopening schools. As we think about the polling numbers with women, how will that translate?

The main polling number that sticks out in my head is that 65% of Americans favor getting the virus under control over opening schools. People are still very afraid of the virus. They don't want their kids to go to school. We needed an organized federal response to this crisis, and Trump has not delivered. There's disapproval of his handling of it, with around 70% of people thinking he's handling it in a bad way. It'll be a bad issue for Trump. Biden did a good job presenting a calm, steady, organized model of leadership. The polling on coronavirus and wanting to get things open in an organized, safe fashion will favor Biden as we get closer to the election.

What are your thoughts on the latest fundraising numbers?

Trump has been getting ready for this race for four years, and Joe Biden had to cut through a field of about 25 different candidates. It was a big fight, and his fundraising was not particularly successful through the primary race. But things have certainly picked up since he secured the nomination. In May and June, Biden and the DNC beat Trump and the Republican National Committee (RNC). Trump got that back in July. Biden and the DNC raised about \$140 million in July, while Trump and the RNC raised about \$165 million. The most important number to look at, though, is the cash on hand. Biden has basically gotten the Democrats' war chest to an even point in four months.

But does the money even matter anymore? In 2016, Clinton spent about \$1.1 billion on her campaign. Trump spent about half of that: \$650 million. In the 2020 primary through Super Tuesday, Bernie Sanders spent about \$55 million on TV, while Biden spent about \$15 million. Biden, as we know after South Carolina, wiped out Sanders in all the states that mattered. The dollars don't necessarily go to polling and electoral success. We'll see if it even matters.

We've talked a lot about Biden's strength and his path to victory. How does President Trump win this election?

The electoral college system is skewed against Democrats because they have huge polling advantages in big states and smaller deficits in small states. Those small states can rack up a lot of electoral votes for Trump, even with small margins of victory. Other than that, there could be a major Biden gaffe, and it would have to be something that shows mental impairment and that he's not fit to be president. The debates will be a test for Biden. Three 90-minute intense sessions against Trump, an intimidating guy. Biden will be able to handle it, but there is potential for Biden to make a major mistake, which would be a benefit for Trump.

There also is a large program of systematic voter suppression in this country. We've seen secretaries of states and Republican-controlled states wiping large numbers of voters off the rolls. There's the situation with the post office taking sorting machines offline and purposely slowing down mail traffic. That could trap a lot of mail ballots, which could impact Biden's performance. Polling places could be shuttered in high-Democratic-performance areas, creating long lines. If people can't wait, they don't vote.

What's coming up on the calendar?

There will be three presidential debates in the fall: September 29, October 15, and October 22, in Cleveland, Miami, and Nashville, respectively. The vice-presidential debate will be on October 7 in Salt Lake City. What's interesting about this is early voting in some of the earliest states starts in September. A large portion of the populace will vote before debates even take place. In '16 and '18, the percentage of early voters was up to about 40% of the electorate. Now with COVID and concerns about attending polls in person, that number will probably go north of 50%.

What are the key policy priorities for a potential Biden administration?

Build Back Better is the main theme of Biden's approach. It'll be economic focused. Part of that will be to address the climate crisis, with a lot of innovation and infrastructure and green energy investments, creating millions of good-paying jobs and union jobs. Biden has been talking about trying to level the playing field economically. There'll be a pretty significant tax implication to that. He's already talked about increasing the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28%, a minimum 15% corporate tax, and bringing back the individual income tax rate of a bracket of 39.6, so basically rolling back a lot of those 2017 tax cuts. Then infrastructure and economic recovery, tax reform, and a ton of work on health care. He's been clear that we need a public option. A Biden administration would reduce the Medicare age to 60. He'll enhance the Affordable Care Act and increase subsidies. There'll be prescription drug reform.

Those are the main areas Biden will tackle right away, with a unified and massive effort to push back on COVID-19 and get it under control, because none of the other stuff can really happen until then.

This article is adapted from the August 21, 2020, GLG teleconference "Presidential Election Forecast: Democratic Perspective."

REPUBLICAN PERSPECTIVE:

Inside a Digital Campaign Strategy

Tyler Brown, former Director of Digital Strategy at the Republican National Committee

With the third of November fast approaching, the campaign efforts of both political parties are in high gear. For insights into Republican election strategies — particularly those of a digital nature — GLG recently met with Tyler Brown, a GLG Council Member and former Director of Digital Strategy at the Republican National Committee (RNC). Brown, who served in multiple senior roles at the RNC over consecutive presidential cycles, helped the committee build its digital infrastructure from a six-person staff to one of the largest and most effective operations in Republican politics. Below are a few select excerpts from our broader conversation.

How are digital campaigns and spending on digital efforts different from traditional campaigns and media buys?

Reporters and the media still struggle to grasp the differences. They tend to focus on campaigns as horse races, looking at who's ahead and behind in the polls, who has more money in the bank, and who is spending more on advertising, especially television advertising. But that's the traditional lens.

Television advertising is about delivering a central message. It's a one-way source of communication. At a presidential level, it's about targeting states or media markets to amplify that one-way message as much as possible. Digital media spending is much different because the medium is effectively two-way. You can reach out to users and provide them with a call to action, and they are able to respond and follow up. This could result in gaining additional volunteers, growing your email list, raising funds, or building online advocates to share your message. So in addition to spending money on television in places where you need to convince people to vote for you, namely swing states, you also do work in states that are not up for grabs but could be a large source of volunteer activity, mobilization, and fundraising. As a result, where and how you spend money tends to be a lot different than in traditional campaigns.

In a digital campaign, you often are speaking to people who are very active politically.

If that's the case, is the messaging different?

The short answer is yes. In traditional campaigns, you're likely to talk about so-called wedge issues, meaning those on which people tend to break one way or another, such as economic growth issues, which are important to the right, and women's choice, which is important to the left. You're trying to form a consensus around some key issues that a majority of voters can connect with.

In a digital campaign, you often are speaking to people who are very active politically. They're what we would call high-information voters. They consume tons of political news on the left or the right, and because of that you may be speaking to more niche or more extreme issues. As a result, you're not so much trying to reach a consensus, but instead speaking to deeply felt beliefs either on the left or on the right.

Secondly, the platforms are different. When you buy TV time, you know for certain your message will run, and when it will run. On digital platforms — and Facebook is the big one — you're bidding for impressions. Platform algorithms make decisions about serving your ads depending on engagement, "likes" and clicks, which creates an incentive to provide electrifying content and messaging.

What's the current regulatory framework for digital campaigning?

It's a patchwork. There are federal regulations that protect personal information, but the rest largely is a matter of guidelines set by the individual platforms as to what they allow and don't allow. I think part of the reason why Congress has not gotten involved in this issue and why you haven't seen as much regulatory action is that it's really hard to define political speech and draw a line separating policy discussions from campaigning.

What about "fake news"?

This gets to the role of the media. With more news sources now available, some ascribe to the traditional role of media as trying to provide objective reporting and information. But others — on both the right and the left — now feel there is merit in providing values-based journalism. With all the many outlets providing their own version and context of events, who's to say which is the fake news? What's more, from a campaign strategy point of view, the multiplicity of news outlets means the notion of trying to control the message — like the strategies of James Carville in 1992 or Lee Atwater in 1988 — has been thrown out the window. Once news or information goes out, you don't have control over it anymore. That's why shaping your candidate's voice and the issues they talk about are so important.

What's your assessment of each campaign's digital ground game to date?

The Republicans had an advantage going into this because they have been building their effort for a long time, and because incumbents always have an advantage in that they are able to keep their organization together and operate through the party committee. Challengers must go through a primary and having limited financial resources to build that operation, so the Biden campaign is playing a catch-up game right now.

What's your view on polling?

I believe there are distinctions between what you will see showing up in polling data versus online activity. Again, online does not represent a scientific sample; it's more a reflection of intensity and activity, which again is not scientific in terms of who's going to go out and vote. But it can be representative of how media's being interpreted, and how information is being disseminated, collected, and amplified to prospective voters. So, I think it's important, but not a way to interpret the horse race itself.

This article is adapted from the August 28, 2020, GLG teleconference "Presidential Election Forecast: Republican Perspective."

REPUBLICAN PERSPECTIVE:

How Should Republicans Position Themselves?

Scott Jennings, former Senior Advisor for the Jeb Bush for President Campaign

Every four years, Americans come together to elect a president. While every presidential campaign is essentially an argument about who is truly fit for the highest office in the land, the 2020 election promises to be more bitter and contentious than most that have gone before it. Both Republicans and Democrats have already surfaced their main talking points, and the barbs being tossed back and forth will likely become only sharper as we move closer to November.

To get the Republican view of the contest so far, GLG asked Scott Jennings, a CNN Political Contributor who has advised former President George W. Bush, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and scores of other Republican politicians, a few questions. Earlier, Scott participated in a GLG Roundtable with Robby Mook, former Presidential Campaign Manager for Hillary Clinton, where they both shared in-depth insights, each from their unique point of view. Scott's answers to our questions appear below.

This election year, vote-by-mail is likely the way many people will cast their ballots. What are some of the pros and cons of mail-in voting and how will that impact get-out-the-vote efforts within the Republican Party?

I think it greatly depends on the state. Some states already rely heavily on voting by mail, and some have little history with it. Culturally, Democrats embrace voting early and voting by mail more than Republicans in most states. The polling on it is clear— look at the split of people who are planning to vote by mail in the presidential election. The vast majority are going for Biden. But that doesn't mean the GOP should give up on it. If there are new avenues for voting, either early or by mail, Republican campaigns should try to use it and not dissuade people. I do think in some areas there could be fewer polling places than usual, so you need to make sure your people can vote whenever and wherever they can. There are some rural areas where polling places could be scarce, and those traditionally go for Republicans. So, you want to make sure people in those rural areas know all their options to casting ballots.



I am not sure either party has done a great job telling people where they will take the country four years from now.

How would you define the Republican platform in this election? What are the key issues at stake for Republican-base voters?

If you want a solid economy and safe neighborhoods, vote for us. Pretty simple. “Make American Normal Again” should be the slogan because I think that’s all anyone wants. To go back to work, for their kids to go back to school, and for a return to life as we knew it before COVID. Republican-base voters still care about base issues — abortion, immigration, the Second Amendment — as well.

What would you expect to see as key policy priorities in a Trump second term?

Based on his convention remarks, I’d expect more conservative economic policies and a focus on school choice. Truthfully, the president hasn’t fully embraced a robust platform the way I think he should as he seeks another four years. Neither has Biden, of course, because he wants a referendum on character and empathy and not issues. So, I am not sure either party has done a great job telling people where they will take the country four years from now.

The COVID-19 pandemic, ensuing economic recession, and ongoing civil unrest promise to be key talking points for both parties during the remainder of the campaign. How do you expect these conversations will evolve as we get closer to November?

Democrats want to talk about coronavirus as a Trump failure; Republicans want to talk about it as an unpredicted emergency that would have happened no matter who the president was. On the economy, Democrats want to blame Trump for the economic hardship largely caused by the COVID lockdowns strongly preferred by Democratic governors, and I don’t think people will find that argument persuasive. Republicans should talk about the economy as bouncing back (which it is) and positioning Biden as someone who will raise taxes and enact slow-growth or no-growth policies. Regarding civil unrest, Republicans will argue that Democratic mayors and governors are too weak to stop them, and that Biden would implant that mindset into the White House. Democrats argue it is all Trump’s fault, although I am not sure people believe that.

It strikes me that the key demographic issue plaguing Trump is the huge gender gap. Women and men are badly split on this election, but the 15- to 20-point gender gap is something Trump must close. Also, remember, Trump can do worse than he did in 2016 in terms of the national popular vote and the Electoral College and still win reelection.

ELECTION LOGISTICS:

The 2020 Presidential Election: Expect Uncertainty

David Mason, former Chairman of the Federal Election Commission

The election between President Donald Trump and former Vice President Joseph Biden is not unprecedented only because it involves the oldest nominees in history, but also that it's amid a pandemic in which we expect to see rates of mail-in voting explode.

To better understand what to expect this November and beyond, GLG spoke with David Mason, Senior Vice President at Aristotle International and former Chairman of the Federal Election Commission. Below are a few select excerpts from our broader discussion.

What governmental bodies regulate elections? Who makes the rules and enforces them?

It's a complex issue. Congress has authority to make legislation involving federal elections on a plenary basis and has exercised that authority occasionally. For the most part, states run elections, and in fact, the real on-the-groundwork is run by local election agencies that are typically at the county or city level. It's a very diverse process, but there's no federal agency that has general oversight authority over elections. When there is a dispute, it's localized. There are huge variations in election rules and practices from state to state, and in some cases, from community to community.

What was the status of mail-in voting pre-COVID?

Mail-in voting has been much more popular on the West Coast — Oregon, Washington, California, Colorado — than the rest of the country. Why? Those states probably have a greater degree of comfort in nontraditional ways of doing things. There was a lot of variation in the percentage of votes that were cast by mail, from single digits in the East and South to much higher rates out west. This year, because of COVID, the number of mail-in ballots has already increased dramatically, overwhelming administrative procedures in states that haven't previously had to deal with mail-in, leading to problems.

What impact did COVID-19 have on the primaries and elections held so far this year? What lessons can be learned from what's happened to date?

The lessons are really all warnings at this point, but because people were afraid to come to polling places to cast their ballots, we had a huge increase in mail-in ballots, and we also



had rapid changes to mail-in ballot procedures. Both overwhelmed local election agencies in a lot of areas. As a result, there were higher invalidation rates for ballots that were cast than historically has been the case. The counting process has also lengthened. There were a couple of congressional primaries in New York that were not called for weeks after the election. Looking to the general election, we can expect more of this.

How are mail-in ballots validated?

The invalidation rate is much higher for mail-in than for in-person ballots. Prior to this election, the rate was about 4% for mail-in, compared with about 1% for in-person ballots. The validation procedures vary by state. Some states require a signature match. Others require a complex form where a lot of boxes must be checked, and if a voter fails to check a box, their ballot can be invalidated. Some states require a witness, and an improperly filled-out witness form can be the basis for invalidation. Of course, if the ballot arrives late, it can be disqualified. Roughly speaking, about half the states require ballots to arrive at the election agency by Election Day, while the other half allow ballots to be postmarked by Election Day to be counted.

How do you see litigation evolving leading up to November?

Already this year, we had a record number of pre-election suits filed, over 150 around the country, involving various things from voting procedures to absentee ballots. Both parties have extensively staffed up and are prepared for this, and so certainly if the presidential election or key House and Senate elections are close in November, we can expect a lot of litigation.

What are some of the types of litigation that we've seen so far?

Issues include voter registration procedures, essentially efforts to try to make it easier or more difficult to vote. Things around ID: what ID is required and whether ID is required. Absentee ballot procedures, as well as a lot of suits to try to make it easier to apply for an absentee ballot or to relax some of the validation requirements on account of COVID concerns.

Outside of litigation, what are some other considerations people should be thinking about for increased utilization of mail-in ballots?

Of course, the Postal Service has been in the news. Mail-in ballots are delivered to voters by mail, then delivered back to election agencies, and the slowdown in delivery has created a situation in which absentee ballots may not arrive at election agencies in time to be counted. That's certainly happened in some primaries. In some cases, they were missing postmarks, which are required under the state election procedures for those votes to be counted, and so that resulted in 14% of absentee ballots in New York being invalidated during the primaries. In states where ballots only must be postmarked by Election Day, the voting process will be extended for well over a week.

In states where ballots only must be postmarked by Election Day, the voting process will be extended for well over a week.

Would that 14% number be something that we could reasonably extrapolate more broadly, or could we see states have potentially much higher invalidation rates?

New York election procedures, like a lot of its laws, are more convoluted than other places, so there was a higher invalidation rate there than elsewhere. Still, we can expect the national average of 4% to go up. If half the ballots are cast by mail this election, which is not out of the realm of possibility, and 6% are invalidated, that means 3% of the ballots across the country will not be valid. If we have a close election, that is a huge margin.

There's a huge partisan difference in absentee ballot casting this year. Historically speaking, Republicans and Democrats had cast them at roughly equal rates, but during the primaries, Democrats cast absentee ballots at a much higher rate, and we can expect that to continue in the fall, in part due to the president's comments about mail-in voting. A recent Marquette University Law School poll found that people who intended to vote in person on Election Day favored Trump by 44%. The people who intended to vote by mail favored Biden by 69%. So, one of the dynamics that could lead to is a Trump lead on election night in Wisconsin that dwindles quickly and possibly disappears as mail-in ballots are counted.

This phenomenon, which political scientists call a blue shift in election counting, has been going on for a while. For instance, in the last election, there were six congressional seats in California that Republicans led based on Election Day results, and as the absentees were counted, the Democrats ultimately won. We'll see that dynamic playing out over days and weeks after the election. Regrettably, it'll lead to a lack of confidence in the election results, particularly among Republicans, as what they thought were victories turn into defeats as votes are counted.

In terms of timing, we also have early voting to think about. What are your expectations for early voting turnout and then Election Day turnout this year?

With all the concern about COVID and the focus on getting votes in, we can expect early voting, which can generally be both in person and by mail, to go up significantly. In some states, such as those in the West, most votes are cast before Election Day. That means an October surprise the week before the election may not be as significant as it might have been in the past.

What changes are needed to better manage elections?

The first challenge is a huge policy disagreement between Republicans — who want more procedures to ensure election integrity to make sure that people who are voting are in fact properly registered, effectively making it harder to vote — and Democrats, who want to open up the voting process and make it easier to vote so that everyone who's eligible to vote can do so.

The second problem is local election agencies, historically, are not well-funded, and they rely on part-timers to work the polls. A lot of those people are older, and that makes them a higher risk for COVID, so staffing will be a challenge. Obviously, if there is better funding for those local election agencies, we would have a better process.

What are your expectations for how quickly we will get a result for November's races?

There's nothing that I've seen in terms of election procedures that indicates municipalities will be substantially better prepared in November than they were during the primaries. So, Election Day won't be Election Day. In the worst case, it'll be several weeks until results appear. That will obviously cause a lot of litigation. The December 8 safe harbor date under the Electoral Count Act is critical, and December 14 is when electors meet in their states. If for some reason we have a dispute still going on about an important result, there could be states that either fail to cast electoral votes, or that cast votes that are subject to dispute. Votes are then counted in a special joint session of Congress on January 6.

As of today, in the presidential race, polls show a big Biden lead. If he wins by a big margin, a lot of this is irrelevant. If the race is close, we could have a big mess. No matter what happens, expect uncertainty in November.

This article is adapted from the July 30, 2020, GLG teleconference "Voting Logistics."

ABOUT OUR COUNCIL MEMBERS

ROBBY MOOK

Robert “Robby” Mook is an American political strategist, who has organized winning organizations at the local, state, and national levels. Robby served as Campaign Manager for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign, where he built a \$1 billion, 50-state, 4,500-person organization. He also ran Terry McAuliffe’s winning campaign for Governor of Virginia and Jeanne Shaheen’s first winning campaign for U.S. Senate, and led the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in 2012, when Democrats gained eight seats. Robby is now the President of the House Majority PAC, the only PAC dedicated to protecting and expanding the Democratic majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. He is also a Senior Fellow and Lecturer at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

DAVID PLOUFFE

David Plouffe served as the campaign manager for Barack Obama’s primary and general election victories in 2008. He was the architect of the strategy for both elections. Prior to running the Obama campaign, Plouffe served as a leading Democratic Party media consultant from 2001 to 2007, playing a key role in the election of US senators, governors, mayors, and House members across the country. He lives in Washington, DC

MATTHEW BUTLER

Matthew Butler has over 20 years of experience as a senior executive, consultant, and attorney. From April 2015 to December 2016, he was the Chief of Staff to the Democratic National Committee. He spent four years at Media Matters for America in a series of escalating roles, ending as Chief Executive Officer. He has served as campaign manager in a number of campaigns, including Senator Chris Dodd’s presidential campaign, Senator Maria Cantwell’s 2006 reelection campaign, and John Kerry’s 2004 presidential campaign.

TYLER BROWN

Tyler Brown is the President and founder of Hadron Strategies. Drawing from over a decade of political experience at the highest level, Tyler helps clients develop and execute strategies to attack complex business challenges. Tyler served in multiple senior roles at the Republican National Committee over consecutive presidential cycles. With his leadership, the committee built its digital infrastructure from a six-person staff to one of the largest and most effective digital, data, and technology operations in Republican politics. During his tenure, the RNC broke new ground in online voter registration and turnout, experienced record-breaking fundraising success, and achieved historic electoral victories at the federal, state, and local level. Over the course of his career, Tyler has successfully guided campaigns, organizations, companies, and educational institutions to reimagine their capabilities in the digital age. With data-driven solutions, he has helped clients maximize existing resources and accomplish goals impacting their bottom lines.

SCOTT JENNINGS

Scott is the Founding Partner of RunSwitch Public Relations, Kentucky's largest PR and public affairs firm, providing senior-level communications, media relations, and crisis management counsel to clients the world over. Scott's unique ability to analyze data and reconcile it with gut-level political instincts makes him a valuable contributor to clients and to CNN, which made him an on-air Political Contributor in June 2017.

The foundation of Scott's career is journalism and understanding how information flows in our complicated media ecosystem. He started over 20 years ago as a reporter and news anchor in Louisville, Kentucky, and today, in addition to his work for CNN, he writes columns for the Los Angeles Times, USA Today, and the Louisville Courier-Journal, among others. Scott has appeared on countless radio and television programs and is one of the most quoted political analysts in the country.

Scott served in four presidential campaigns and in numerous federal and state races. He served in key roles for President George W. Bush's campaigns in 2000 and 2004, before becoming Special Assistant to the President for Political Affairs. Scott's White House portfolio involved political appointments, including roles in confirming two Supreme Court Justices (Roberts and Alito). He advised on the President's domestic travel and briefed the President, Vice President, and senior-level White House officials. He advised the campaigns of Mitt Romney in 2012 and Jeb Bush in 2016.

After leaving his service to President Bush in 2007, Scott moved home to Kentucky, where he launched a successful public relations and affairs practice advising clients ranging from Fortune 25s to small nonprofits. Scott's greatest skill is distilling complex issues into digestible messages built for the intersection of public policy and the modern communications environment.

DAVID MASON

David Mason has 30 years of public policy experience, including senior positions in the legislative and executive branches. He served as Member and Chairman of the Federal Election Commission from 1998 to 2008. Previously, Mr. Mason was Senior Fellow and Vice President at the Heritage Foundation, a leading public policy organization. In Congress, he was Staff Director to the House Republican Whip and advisor to a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee. During the Reagan Administration he was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative Affairs). His campaign finance experience includes the political, lobbying, and advocacy activities of corporations, nonprofit organizations, and individuals, including foreign corporations and investors. Mr. Mason also has extensive experience in congressional ethics, budget and parliamentary processes, and the Administrative Procedures Act. He is currently an independent policy consultant in Washington, DC, and a Senior Vice President at Aristotle International.





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