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Why Secret Trump Voters Are The Crucial Bet For Shifting Election Odds

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After the party conventions, President Donald Trump's odds of winning re-election peaked at 48% on online sportsbook Bovada. After the Supreme Court vacancy, first debate smackdown, and then Trump's COVID diagnosis, Joe Biden's betting odds rose by over 10 points. Meanwhile, polls continue to be all over the place - due, perhaps, to the strong possibility that a significant part of the electorate won't discuss their vote.

"Odds for Biden actually spiked after Tuesday night's debate," according to VegasElectionOdds.com, "primarily on the strength that he didn't actually keel over at the podium on live television. Biden, it must be said, handled the fight against Trump better than most expected."

Once Trump was diagnosed with COVID and admitted to Walter Reed Military Hospital, all bets were off - literally. "We suspended all betting Friday when he was admitted," Bovada political oddsmaker Pat Morrow told me. "We resumed wagering around 4 pm this afternoon" - that was Monday, as Trump returned to the White House - "with Biden -175, Trump +145 - roughly Biden 61%/Trump 39%."

Bovada's odds are the strongest for Trump. The Real Clear Politics betting average, as of Tuesday, calls it Biden 64%/Trump 35.1%.

When it comes to polls, the Real Clear Politics (RCP) average has Biden up 9 points nationally, and 4.4 points in battleground states. But different polls feed completely different narratives. The most recent poll from *NBC/Wall Street Journal* has Biden up 14 points, while Trump-bashing CNN has Biden up 16 points. Biden landslide? Not so fast.

Three other larger polls have the race as a toss-up. Zogby has Biden up by only 47% to 45% - two points. Investor's Business Daily has Biden up by 2.7% - 48.6% to 45.9%. And the Democracy Institute - which forecast Trump's 2016 upset and Brexit - has Trump up a point, 46% to 45%. All three results lay all within their respective margins of error. Democracy Institute shows Trump with a narrow but significant 4-point lead in battleground states Florida, Minnesota, and New Hampshire.

RCP excluded Zogby and Democracy Institute from their average, skewing it bigly toward Biden.

At the same time, other surveys show Trump doing better than the RCP average would indicate. Trump voters hold far more enthusiasm for their candidate than the Democrats do theirs. A poll from the ABC News/*Washington Post*, both anti-Trump, nonetheless found Trump voters more than twice as enthusiastic about their candidate. Democrats tend to be anti-Trump more than pro-Biden.

In September, Gallup measured Trump's favorability at 44%, while Rasmussen's daily tracking poll has ranged between 45-53%. This range matches the high point of Trump's presidency and about the same approval President Obama had in the weeks before his 2012 re-election. And according to Gallup at the end of September, 56% of voters expect Trump to win, while only 40% expect Biden to prevail.

What gives? Quite possibly secret Trump voters aka shy Trump voters - people who will vote for Orange Man but aren't likely to tell friends, family, or pollsters because of the risk of ostracism, losing their jobs, or getting attacked by social justice warrior mobs. CNN and the *New York Times* doubt their very existence. FiveThirtyEight flatly says, "There aren't secret Trump voters."

My own intuition and conversations with people around Las Vegas and the country in recent weeks directly contradicts this mainstream narrative. So does a wide range of research.

The libertarian Cato Institute found 62% of Americans feel uncomfortable sharing their political views. Cato found "strong liberals" - aka people who watch CNN, read the *Times*, and pay attention to FiveThirtyEight - to be the only group where a majority felt comfortable. The difference between "strong liberals" and centrist Democrats, according to Cato, "demonstrates that political expression is an issue that divides the Democratic coalition between centrist Democrats and their left flank."

CloudResearch found Republican voters more than twice as reluctant to share their preference as Democrats. Rasmussen found a similar trend. According to the Democracy Institute, it's even higher. While 87% of Biden supporters said they were "comfortable with relatives, friends, coworkers knowing how you vote," only 22% of Trump voters felt comfortable. That is a four-fold difference.

In at least five battleground states - Pennsylvania, Florida, North Carolina, Arizona, and Nevada - GOP voter registration is far outpacing Democrats. In the first three states, Republicans are registering over twice as many voters.

At the same time, a wide range of polls show Trump earning higher percentages of Black and Hispanic voters than he did in 2016. Popular hashtags like #Blexit, #WalkAway, and #DemExit all speak to the impending defection, and perhaps explain attempts by Democrats and the mainstream news media to label Trump and his voters as white supremacists. And a recent Harvard University poll found that 21% of voters surveyed say they could change their vote by election day.

How about an unscientific poll of truckers? "The general consensus from callers to my radio show," writes Fox Across America host Jimmy Failla, "is that Trump signs

outnumber Biden signs by about 25 to 1 in all 50 states. The truth is, there are a ton of parallels between this race and 2016. Perhaps the most damning one for the Biden campaign is that the polls tell one story but our eyes tell another.”

We shall see - but bettors must keep one eye on the following. Just like in 2016, Trump again appears to hold the advantage in the Electoral College due to having strong support in more states. So if he gets the popular vote within about 2% again, like 2016, he’s got a strong chance of being re-elected.

In 2016, Trump outperformed the RCP average in battleground states by an average of four points. That’s about what he’s trailing in that average right now. So is 4 points a good over/under for secret Trump voters in 2020?

“Trump is probably outperforming” the polls, Bovada’s Morrow says. Patrick Basham, director of the Democracy Institute polls, believes there are even more secret Trump voters in 2020 than in 2016. I agree with both of them. The question for bettors is, how many more?