

# Polling Insights from Scott Rasmussen

November 11, 2024



**NAPOLITAN**  
Institute  
**GOLD CIRCLE MEMBERS**



## VOTER PRIORITIES

The most important use of polling is to help us understand what voters are trying to tell us. The data from Election 2024 points to three clear objectives that voters expect from the incoming Trump Administration.

1. **Make the economy work for all Americans:** Heading into the election, just 25% of voters thought the economy was getting better while 41% said worse. Voters in swing states were even more pessimistic.
2. **Secure the southern border:** This has been Donald Trump's signature issue since he rode down that escalator nine years ago. It's become even more important to voters as the impact of Biden's open border policy has been felt nationwide.
3. **Return to common sense around gender identity:** Simply put, voters recognize that men and women are different. They want their governments and societal institutions to stop insisting that they are not.

In the rest of this memo, we'll look at [a significant victory, but not a landslide](#); [the accidental presidency of Joe Biden](#); and [a good election for the polling industry](#).

## A SIGNIFICANT VICTORY, BUT NOT A LANDSLIDE

Much has been written about the scope of Donald Trump's victory. It is significant that he won a popular vote victory, the first time a Republican has done so in 20 years. The past and future president also made historic gains among Black and Hispanic voters. And, of course, his victory was accompanied by the GOP winning control of the Senate and keeping control of the House. That's a strong showing.

However, it's important to avoid getting carried away by the hype. A realistic assessment of the results shows that it was not a landslide. While Trump won the popular vote, it was by the narrowest of margins (approximately one percentage point). Since 1888, only three winning candidates have had a smaller popular vote victory (1960, 2000, and 2016).

Additionally, it looks like he will fall short of winning a majority of voters (current estimates show him winning about 49.8%). In other words, despite the president's strong showing, a majority of voters cast their ballots for someone else.

None of this is meant to diminish the significance of the incoming president's victory. Four years ago, I described "[President-elect Biden as a 21st century mash-up](#) of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter" and predicted he would be little more than a transition president. As we know now, "The Ford and Carter



administrations paved the way for Ronald Reagan to become the most influential president since Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s.”

Donald Trump now has the opportunity to become the most influential president since Ronald Reagan. If over the next four years he and the Republican Congress can achieve the three main priorities established by the American people, he will have presided over a fundamental political realignment and paved the way for ongoing GOP success.

However, Trump’s lasting influence and the potential realignment are far from assured. They depend entirely upon whether or not the incoming administration can do what voters are hoping for: making the economy work, securing the border, and returning to common sense about gender identity. If they fail, voters will move on, and the Trump era will be just a blip in the nation’s history.

## THE ACCIDENTAL PRESIDENCY OF JOE BIDEN

In January of 2020, President Trump had a consistent lead in the polls, and his re-election prospects were looking good. My assessment at the time was he would be re-elected as long as the economy held up.

None of us anticipated the pandemic that led to unprecedented government lockdowns, harmful school closings, and 40 million people losing their jobs. Given those fundamentals, Biden should have won big, but he barely hung on. That was an early warning sign of just how weak the Democratic brand had become (a warning sign team Biden ignored while in office).

In retrospect, it now appears that the Biden Administration was simply an accident of history brought on by the pandemic. That accident may end up making President Trump’s second term more consequential. Trump didn’t know what he was getting himself into following the 2016 election from either a personnel or policy perspective. He is far more prepared for his return to office than he would have been following a victory in 2020.

Looking at the larger sweep of history, this was the tenth election in a row where no candidate topped 53% of the vote. And it looks like this will be the fifth of those ten races where the winner failed to reach even 50% of the vote. (At the moment, Trump looks likely to win about 49.8% of the vote.)

With control of the Senate and (probably) the House, President Trump will have the opportunity to end that cycle by reaching out to more centrist voters—including Democrats—who reject the extremism of progressive Democrats.

It remains to be seen whether he will grasp that opportunity and set the stage for a landslide election that America so desperately needs.



## 2024 WAS A GOOD ELECTION FOR THE POLLING INDUSTRY

Lost amidst the larger story of Donald Trump's victory last week is the news that the polls were very good this cycle. At the national level, the Real Clear Politics average showed the popular vote to be a pure tossup. When all the votes are counted, it appears that President Trump will have won the popular vote by a single percentage point. In other words, the RCP polling average came within one point of the national popular vote.

All the major polling averages were pretty good in 2024, but I'll focus my comments on RCP, since they were a bit closer to the mark. The RCP average was based upon 17 polls; 16 of them were within two points of the final result.

The swing state polling was generally accurate as well. In Georgia, the polling average was within a point of the final result. Nine of the 10 Georgia polls in the RCP average were within two points of the final result. In North Carolina, the average was within two points of the final result. Eight of the 11 Tarheel State polls were within a couple of points.

Similar results were found in other swing states. Perhaps the biggest "miss" was found in Arizona. Not all the votes are in yet, but it appears that the polling average there was likely off by about three points. Still, nine of the ten polls included in the average showed Trump ahead, and the tenth showed a tie. In other words, the Arizona polling pointed to a clear victory for the GOP.

Obviously, the polls weren't perfect. They never can be. And, yes, there were some spectacular misses. The Selzer poll in Iowa drew a lot of attention, and CNN projected Harris +6 in Wisconsin.

But the complete set of polling data was clear enough to see that the race would be close and that Trump was more likely to win than lose (a statement I made publicly before the election). Trump had the edge in the southern swing states, which meant that he just needed to win one of the tossup Blue Wall states. That made him the favorite.

Ultimately, of course, Trump won all seven swing states. Some he won by comfortable margins (Arizona) and some just barely (Wisconsin). That sweep was decisive enough to avoid any controversy, but it doesn't change the reality that the election was very close. In the three Blue Wall states, 17 million votes were cast. A swing of just 250,000 votes in those states would have made Kamala Harris president.