

To: Interested Parties

From: Ben Deufel, Director of Innovation, Learning and Impact

Re: The Rising American Electorate and the 2020 Election

Date: December 22, 2020

Democracy works best when our government represents all of us. The Rising American Electorate— young people, people of color and unmarried women make up a majority of those who are eligible to vote in America, but they are underrepresented in the share of American who cast ballots. That is why VPC and CVI work to support these Americans in their efforts to register to vote and turn out for elections so that they can have the influence they should in our electoral choices.

With these goals and work in mind, this analysis provides an initial view into the role of the RAE in the 2020 presidential election. It leverages AP VoteCast data on who voted and for which candidate, survey data from U.S. Census Bureau, and number of ballots cast to show:

- **The RAE increased its turnout and its share among those who voted.** Population growth, especially of younger generations and people of color, played an important role. Turnout increases, especially of unmarried women, also supported RAE growth in the electorate.
- **Yet, the participation gap remains too large.** The RAE's participation is still muted relative to its share of eligible voters.
- **Voter mobilization likely mattered to explain RAE Impact.** In key states with close margins where groups worked to mobilize the RAE, the participation gap fell from 2016 to 2020, suggesting mobilization efforts in those states boosted RAE representation.
- **All segments within the RAE contributed to the election outcome.** The RAE electoral contribution reflects the RAE's size in the electorate as well as clear vote choice. In key states, the RAE's role was strong relative to margins of victory.
- **People of color and unmarried women had large impacts on the election,** especially in contrast to white voters and men and married women.
- **Turnout increases and population change played a key role in the RAE's impact on the 2020 election outcome.** In key states with close margins, in many cases these changes alone exceeded the margin of victory.

The figures are preliminary and a down payment on work to come. Survey estimates have the potential for response errors, as some voters may overreport their voting or not respond at all. With this in view, in the months ahead VPC and CVI aims to update the

estimates with voter file information, surveys of validated voters, and estimates of the 2020 eligible voter population. Some numbers will likely shift, and parts of the story could change as a result.

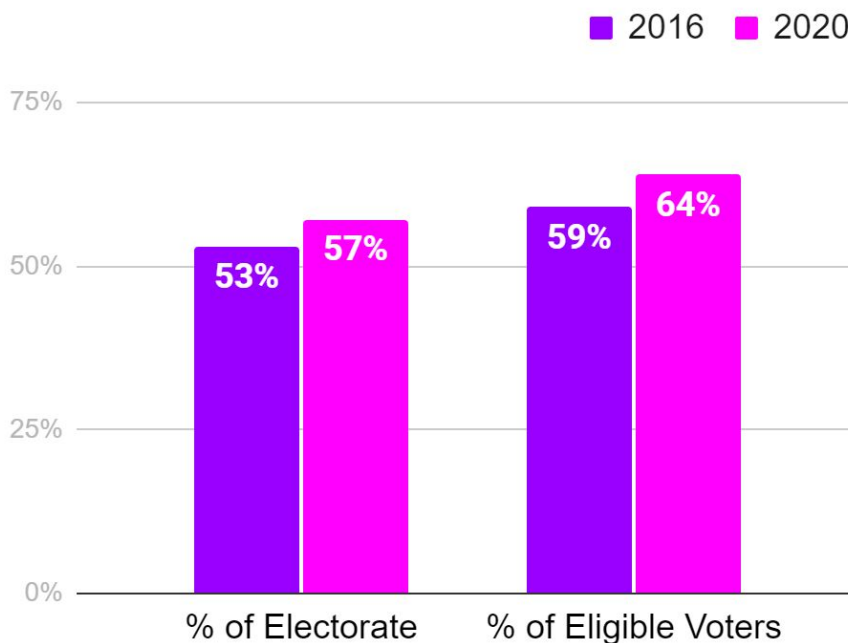
Additionally, the RAE is made up of large, overlapping, and diverse segments that are not monoliths. While the analysis here looks at these segments holistically, VPC and CVI also plan to build on the approach here to conduct further research to look deeper within segments and states and understand the considerable diversity and intersectionality within the Rising American Electorate.

That said, the key findings will likely hold up well given the clear trends behind the basic and striking math in this analysis. RAE mobilization and turnout mattered in this election, and the RAE’s role in the electorate is powerful.

The Growing Role of the RAE in the Electorate

Nationally, the Rising American Electorate increased its share of the electorate (those who voted in the election) from 53% in 2016 to 57% in 2020, a gain of 4 percentage points (Figure 1). It also grew its turnout rate (the share who voted among those eligible) by 6 points, and all segments within the RAE played a role in this growing participation. Ballots cast by the RAE from 2016 to 2020 increased by 18.4 million, a 25% jump.

Figure 1: RAE Share of Electorate and Eligible Voters



In terms of segments, Gen Z and Millennials (voters under 40 years old) gained most in the electorate given sizable population growth and rising younger voter turnout, increasing in share from 23% of the electorate in 2016 to 28% in 2020. These generations cast nearly 13.1 million more ballots than in 2016.

Unmarried women showed particularly strong gains in turnout (+11 percentage points). Over 8.5 million more ballots were cast by unmarried women than in 2016. At 26% of the electorate, this figure matched their share of eligible voters. In other words, in 2020, unmarried women as a group showed no participation gap—a remarkable achievement for this traditionally underrepresented group.

People of color remained steady at 26% of the electorate, powered by absolute gains in turnout and population growth. The initial estimate here is that people of color cast nearly 5.8 million more ballots in 2020 than 2016. Of that, African Americans cast nearly 1.1 million more ballots. For Latinx voters, that figure is just over 2 million more ballots in 2020.

Unfortunately, the RAE is still not represented relative to its share in the population of eligible voters. The participation gap between the RAE and those outside of it—the difference between the RAE as a share of the electorate and its share of the eligible voting population—was similar to 2016 and still too large in 2020 at 7 percentage points. (The RAE is 57% of the electorate and 64% of eligible voters, as revealed in Figure 1).

While the Rising American Electorate's turnout was higher, those outside the RAE increased turnout more according to these preliminary figures. Our initial estimates indicate those not in the Rising American Electorate increased their turnout by +11 points, thus fostering the participation gap with the RAE.

At the same time, these are national figures, and the story is better for RAE representation in seven key states where margins of victory were close (Table 1, next page). In general, RAE growth in the electorate in these states exceeded the growth of the eligible voters in these states, and this in turn narrowed participation gaps (the difference between shares of the electorate and shares of eligible voters). This result was powered by large increases in turnout, in a majority of cases exceeding national gains for the Rising American Electorate.

For example, Arizona tells the story of these states. The RAE grew from 52% to 58% of

the electorate from 2016 to 2020, a gain of 6 points—higher than the national growth of 4 points. Moreover, the participation gap shrank in Arizona as this growth of the RAE in the electorate exceeded its increase among eligible voters (4 points). Finally, this shrinking gap by the RAE in Arizona was driven by a 12 point turnout rate increase.

Table 1: The Rising American Electorate’s Share and Turnout in Key States

	% of Electorate:			% of Eligible:			Turnout Rate:		
	2016	2020	pp Δ	2016	2020	pp Δ	2016	2020	pp Δ
Arizona	52%	58%	+6	61%	65%	+4	50%	62%	+12
Florida	55%	60%	+5	61%	65%	+3	60%	67%	+7
Georgia	58%	62%	+4	64%	69%	+5	53%	59%	+6
Michigan	44%	52%	+7	52%	58%	+5	56%	67%	+10
North Carolina	56%	56%	+0	61%	64%	+3	63%	64%	+1
Pennsylvania	47%	48%	+2	51%	57%	+5	58%	63%	+4
Wisconsin	39%	46%	+7	47%	51%	+4	57%	68%	+11
National	53%	57%	+4	59%	64%	+5	55%	61%	+6

The RAE’s share of the electorate is still too small relative to its share among eligible voters, and the national figures make clear that high turnout elections do not guarantee better representation of the RAE. However, the findings in key states provide indirect evidence that mobilization played a helpful role in ensuring the RAE’s voice was heard. These states saw disproportionate support from groups and organizations to mobilize voter registration and turnout by the RAE, and the outsized growth of the RAE in these states suggests such efforts had an impact. Mobilization reduced the participation gap.

The RAE’s Strong Impact on the 2020 Presidential Election Outcome

The composition of the electorate is only one part of a segment’s influence in the election. The second part is whether or not this segment votes strongly one way or another as a group. If there is a very big segment in the electorate, but it splits its votes between candidates, its influence will be less than a smaller segment that strongly supports one candidate.

To understand this, one can calculate the *margin contribution* for segments by multiplying their size in the electorate by their margin of support for one candidate relative to the other (in this analysis, percentage voting for Biden minus the share voting for Trump). This produces the relative impact of the segment on the outcome as long as one meets the conditions of having segments that do not overlap and all those segments sum up to the total population.

Figure 2 shows this calculation and the margin contributions for the Rising American Electorate versus those outside the RAE. A positive vote margin means a segment supported Biden over Trump by that many points. In turn, a negative margin signifies a segment supported Trump over Biden by that many points. The math shows the Rising American Electorate’s margin toward Biden relative to Trump was matched by the non-RAE in the other direction (22 absolute percentage points for each). However, the RAE’s more sizable electorate share (57%) means that its margin contribution was greater than those outside the RAE— a 13 point margin contribution for the RAE versus -9 points for the non-RAE. When these two figures are summed together, the result is 4 points, roughly equal to the margin of the presidential election.

Figure 2: Margin Contribution of RAE versus non-RAE

	Share of Electorate	×	Vote Margin: % Biden-%Trump	=	Margin Contribution (pp)
Rising American Electorate	57%		+22		+13
Non-RAE	43%		-22		-9

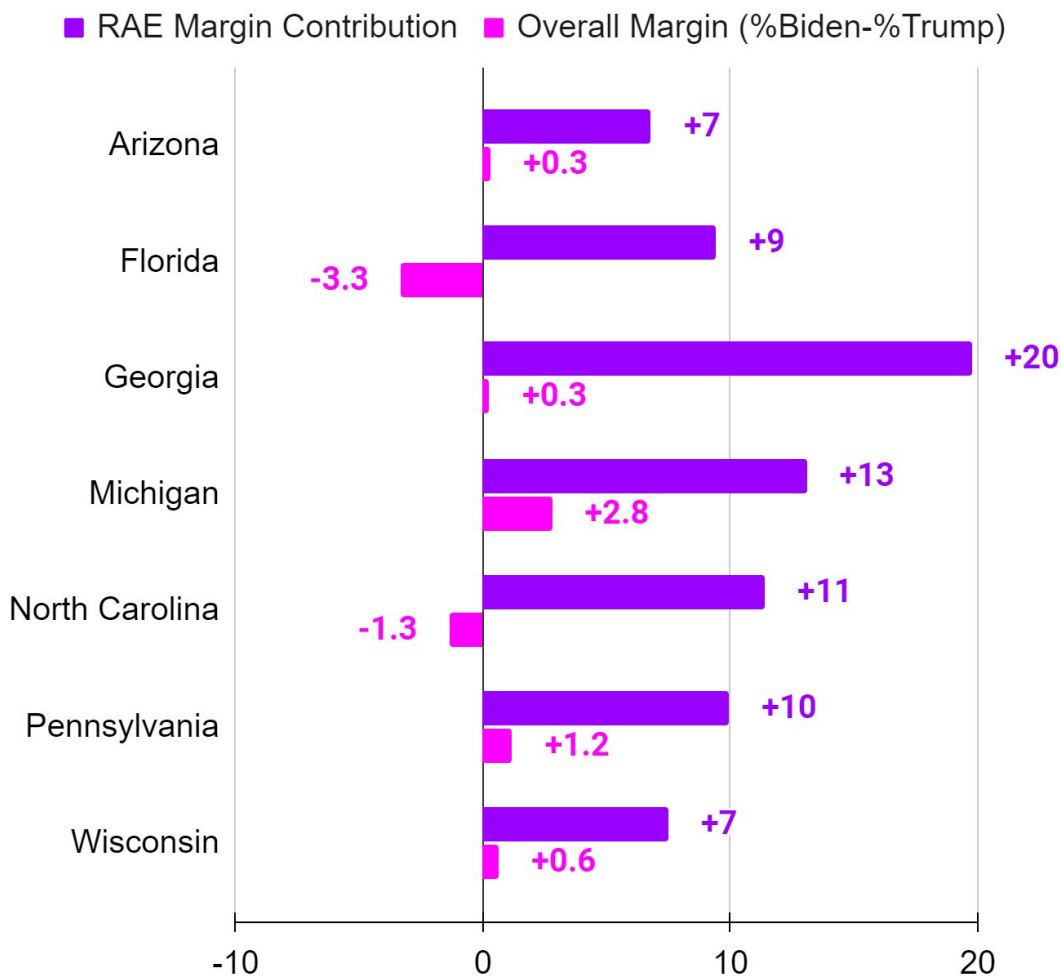
All segments within the RAE contributed to this overall margin contribution, reflecting their strong lean toward Biden. In particular, people of color and unmarried women had especially large impacts on the outcome with 12 point and 7 point margin contributions, respectively.

This is because the RAE overwhelmingly supported Biden over Trump. Very large margins of Biden relative to Trump explain why voters of color had a large impact on the election outcome, especially relative to their share of the electorate.

Outside the RAE, the margin contributions were more muted, with the exception of white non-college voters. Their margin contribution nets at -11 points, reflecting their large share of the electorate and strong net support for Trump over Biden. Yet, this was undercut by white college voters, who had a margin contribution of 2 points, showing greater support of Biden than Trump.

The RAE also showed strong margin contributions in key states especially relative to the close margins of victory, as shown in Figure 3. Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and especially Georgia all stand out with double digit margin contributions from the RAE.

Figure 3: Margins by State (%Biden-%Trump)



The Significant Role of RAE Turnout and Population Change on Election Outcomes

The final step combines margin contribution with changes in population and turnout. By identifying the share of those who voted in 2020 for a given segment as a result of turnout rate change, and then multiplying that share by margin contribution, one can directly quantify the impact of turnout increases on the outcome. The same calculation can be made for population change. Figure 4 shares the math for the RAE and non-RAE.

The RAE had the same impact from turnout growth as the non-RAE (1.2 points) despite smaller turnout increases by the RAE. This is because the RAE’s margin contribution was bigger, reflecting its larger size. In short, because the RAE is a bigger share of the electorate, its increases yield more votes. The RAE’s underrepresentation and size also offers an opportunity for its greater impact from turnout increases.

Looking at turnout rate changes alone, the RAE and non-RAE essentially cancel each other out. However, this is a bit misleading because the RAE actually grew in its share of eligible voters. Figure 4 shows that population change added another 1.5 points for Biden over Trump from the RAE. Summing the two changes shows a 2.7 point impact toward Biden relative to Trump from RAE turnout growth and population change.

Figure 4: Margin Contributions from Turnout Growth and Population Change

	Margin Contribution (pp)	×	Change in 2020 Electorate from Turnout Growth	=	Margin Contribution from Turnout Growth
Rising American Electorate	+12.6		9%		+1.2
Non-RAE	-9.3		13%		-1.2

	Margin Contribution (pp)	×	Change in 2020 Electorate from Population Change	=	Margin Contribution from Population Change
Rising American Electorate	+12.6		12%		+1.5
Non-RAE	-9.3		-9%		+0.8

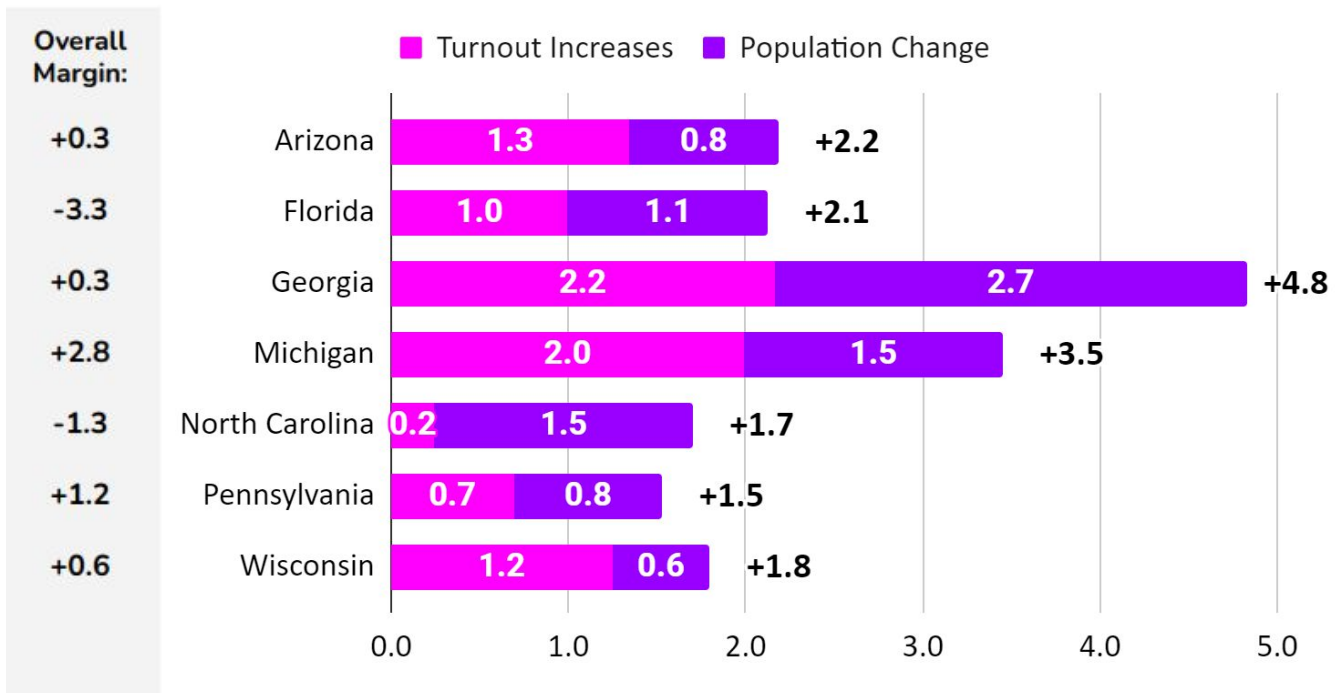
In contrast, Figure 4 reveals that because the non-RAE shrank in size, its margin contribution toward Trump was reduced, adding 0.8 points for Biden relative to Trump and effectively cancelling out much of the impact of the non-RAE’s turnout increases. Summing the two changes yields 0.4 points away from Biden toward Trump, or little total impact from the non-RAE from these changes, especially relative to the RAE.

Individual RAE segments also show a meaningful impact from these changes, including with people of color (1.8 points margin contribution from these changes), unmarried women (1.4 points), and Gen Z and Millennials (1.6 points).

The non-RAE segments had generally low margin contributions from turnout increases and population growth. The one exception was white voters without a college education, yielding 1.3 points away from Biden toward Trump.

Finally, Figure 5 shows the significant impact of turnout increases and population growth on the election outcome in key states. For comparison, it also lists the overall margin of victory on the left, revealing the relatively large impact of these changes. In five of the seven states, RAE turnout increases added a point or more to the margin for Biden relative to Trump. The impact of population and turnout changes exceeded the overall margin of victory in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Figure 5: RAE Margin Contribution (Biden-Trump) from Turnout and Pop. Change



The RAE Representation Opportunity

This analysis here shows a compelling story of electoral influence. Because of its size and its large margins in support of Biden instead of Trump, the RAE's turnout increases mattered more and were magnified by its population growth. With greater turnout increases by the RAE in key states, the RAE had a significant impact where it mattered most in the outcome and narrowed representation gaps.

The RAE lags in terms of share of the electorate relative to population size, making plain that it remains underrepresented. This poses an important challenge to American democracy. All citizens should have an equal voice and be represented by elected leaders.

Yet, the findings and basic math here reveal that challenge to also be an opportunity and provides encouragement for VPC and CVI's efforts. Greater increases in turnout in those states with close margins gives evidence that mobilization aided the RAE in increasing their representation. VPC and CVI played an active role in the states working to register and turnout members of the Rising American Electorate.

In addition, because the RAE is bigger and continues to grow, there is more opportunity to increase their influence in the long-run. With this opportunity in mind and the evidence of impact from mobilization efforts, VPC and CVI will work to continue to support the Rising American Electorate in closing gaps in equality of participation and representation.

Data Sources

2020 Electorate and 2020 Vote Choice

Reported by or derived from AP VoteCast, a survey of the American electorate conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago for Fox News, NPR, PBS NewsHour, Univision News, USA Today Network, The Wall Street Journal and The Associated Press. The survey of 110,485 voters was conducted for eight days, concluding as polls closed. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The survey combines a random sample of registered voters drawn from state voter files; self-identified registered voters contacted using NORC's probability based AmeriSpeak® panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population; and self-identified registered voters selected from nonprobability online panels. The margin of sampling error for voters is estimated to be plus or minus 0.4 percentage points. Find more details about AP VoteCast's methodology at <https://ap.org/votecast>. Data reflects stage 7 data, adjusted to reflect preliminary vote totals as of 12 pm on Nov. 16, 2020.

State data details in this presentation:

State Samples	Sample Size (Responses)	Margin of Error (Percentage Points)
Arizona	3772	2.0
Florida	3698	2.0
Georgia	3291	2.2
Michigan	3571	2.0
North Carolina	3731	1.9
Pennsylvania	4134	1.8
Wisconsin	3506	2.0

2016 Electorate and 2016 and 2020 Eligible Voters

Overall and for RAE, African American, Latinx, unmarried women, generations, ages 40+, and marital status/gender provided by Lake Research Partners analysis of Current Population Surveys. Remaining electorate and eligible voter figures reported by or derived from from [Detailed Tables](#) (accessed Nov. 7, 2020) of, "Democrats Made Gains From Multiple Sources in 2018 Midterm Victories" Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (Sept. 8, 2020)

<https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2020/09/08/democrats-made-gains-from-multiple-sources-in-2018-midterm-victories/> and "An Early Look at the 2020 Electorate," Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (Jan. 30, 2019), <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/an-early-look-at-the-2020-electorate/>.

Data Sources (Continued)

Total Ballots Cast (Not Reported Directly, but to Derive Turnout Rates)

National: Total ballots for 2016 from the [Clerk of the House of Representatives](#), last accessed on Dec. 9, 2020.

States: From available state government figures, including [Arizona](#), [Florida](#), [Georgia](#), [Michigan](#), [North Carolina](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [Wisconsin](#). All accessed on Nov. 26 with the exception of North Carolina (accessed Nov. 20, 2020), Pennsylvania (Dec. 9, 2020) and Wisconsin (Dec. 3, 2020).

Turnout Rates

Calculated based on eligible voter and electorate shares based on eligible voter figures and total ballots cast, sourced above.